

OLFACTORY IMAGES AND CREATION OF MEANING IN GOGOL'S
"THE NOSE" AND RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

A Thesis

by

MAGDALENA VINTROVA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2004

Major Subject: Comparative Literature and Culture

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Approved as to style and content by:

Marian Eide
(Chair of Committee)

Patricia Phillippy
(Member)

Olga M. Cooke
(Member)

Richard J. Golsan
(Member)

Paul A. Parrish
(Head of Department)

August 2004

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ABSTRACT

Olfactory Images and Creation of Meaning in Gogol's "The Nose" and Rushdie's

Midnight's Children. (August 2004)

Magdalena Vintrova, Dipl., Palacky University, Czech Republic

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Marian Eide

In my thesis I argue that Gogol's "The Nose" and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* are texts in which both authors are acutely aware of the fact that they write within a larger discursive framework, supported and developed by the privileged and ruling class of both societies. These grand narratives are in fact selected interpretations of reality, which circulate in the public sphere, designating the desired 'readings' of various socio-cultural phenomena. By means of reiteration and enforcement through governmental powers, the privileged narratives produce and inscribe meaning onto objects and events, turning them into icons with very specific and restricted signification. In this way, truth and meaning are under control of select individuals and interest groups. I propose that Gogol in "The Nose" and Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* use nasal discourse to discern the manipulative process of ideological intervention, which selectively labels specific discourse and interpretation as the truth, and imposes it upon the life and history of the governed community. To utilize the olfactory in a manner challenging the dominant narratives, the authors construct nasal images as essentially ambiguous. In this way they point out to the fluid and unstable nature of reality. In the world of their fiction, reality does not have a singular meaning; every sign is open to interpretation, producing a new

meaning, depending on the circumstances of the interpretative act. The nose itself is chosen for this symbolic function for two reasons: the physiognomic tradition of reading faces nests moral ambiguity in the nose, and scent is the most ambiguous of sensory stimuli. Chapter I focuses on the structural role of the olfactory, in Chapters III and IV I discuss how Rushdie and Gogol employ and adapt physiognomic theory to constitute the olfactory as ambiguous images. In Chapters V and VI show that both authors install the olfactory-introduced ambiguity into the very foundations of their texts.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this manuscript to those without whose support and care continuously inspire me to higher and better achievements in my academic career and in my life: to my parents and Mehdi Yusifov. Without their love and understanding this contribution would not be possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In February 2003 I attended a colloquium of Southwest Association of Slavic Studies held at Texas A&M University. One of the scholars, presenting a paper on Russian art in relation to the city of St. Petersburg, shared an anecdote with her audience, concerning the theft of one of the city's monuments. A giant, 100-kg marble statue of a nose erected to honor Gogol's short story "The Nose" disappeared from its designated place.¹ The incident captured my attention and pointed in a direction that eventually leads my thesis. For several years, I have been an enthusiastic reader of Salman Rushdie's novels, searching for an opportunity to explore a topic not yet discussed within the extensive body of Rushdie criticism. The anecdote related to Gogol's short story reminded me of the abundance of olfactory imagery in *Midnight's Children* and I decided to read "The Nose" to see whether I would find any noteworthy parallels or points of intersection between the two works of fiction. My interest in the exploration of the topic increased even more, when I reread the collection of Rushdie's essays, *Imaginary Homelands*. Its opening essay contains a statement with which Rushdie situates himself in literary context. He maintains that

it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents. My own – selected half consciously, half not – include Gogol, Cervantes, Kafka, Melville, Machado de Assis; a polyglot tree, against which I measure myself, and to which I would be honored to belong. (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 21)

This thesis follows the style and format of the *MLA Handbook*.

Guided by coincidence, by Rushdie's claim of Gogol as his literary parent and by my observation of the olfactory prominence in *Midnight's Children* and in "The Nose," I decided to explore the role and development of the nasally-related imagery in these works.

In my thesis I argue that "The Nose" and *Midnight's Children* are texts in which both authors are acutely aware of the fact that they write within a larger discursive framework, supported and developed by the privileged and ruling class of both societies. These grand narratives are in fact selected interpretations of reality, which circulate in the public sphere, designating the desired 'readings' of various socio-cultural phenomena. By means of reiteration and enforcement through governmental powers, the privileged narratives produce and inscribe meaning onto objects and events, turning them into icons with very specific and restricted signification. In this way, truth and meaning are under control of select individuals and interest groups. They do not crystallize naturally through the process of social consensus; they are created and implemented by those in the position of power in the respective nation. I propose that Gogol in "The Nose" and Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* use nasal discourse to discern the manipulative process of ideological intervention, which selectively labels specific discourse and interpretation as the truth, and imposes it upon the life and history of the governed community. To utilize the olfactory in a manner challenging the dominant narratives, the authors construct nasal images as essentially ambiguous. In this way they point out to the fluid and unstable nature of reality. In the world of their fiction, reality does not have a singular meaning; every sign is open to interpretation, producing a new

meaning, depending on the circumstances of the interpretative act. The nose itself is chosen for this symbolic function for two reasons: the physiognomic tradition of reading faces nests moral ambiguity in the nose, and scent is the most ambiguous of sensory stimuli.

In Gogol's case, the incidents around Kovalyov's missing nose serve to critique the behavior of carefully selected individuals, who are always associated with the distribution of power. Read metonymically, the protagonists of "The Nose" can be perceived as character types, as individualized parts representing in the narrative the system as a whole. Their moral decay, financial corruption and abuse of power, revealed through the nasally motivated episodes, thus become inscribed into the whole system of governmental administration. I propose that since Gogol's experience with the power system manipulating meaning was very immediate, he employs olfactory imagery in his story in an equivocal manner. On one hand, he uses it to discredit the power system and reveal its manipulative methods, and on the other hand he employs the olfactory to cloak his social critique in the fog of ambiguity, protecting it from the attacks of censors.² Constructing the nose as an ambiguous image, Gogol's narrative restores the fluid nature of reality. "The Nose" makes little sense, if the meanings of words and images are taken solely at face value. Instead, the story requires that the readers explore both denotative and connotative dimensions and develop their interpretations of the text. Since the temporal and spatial setting of the incidents coincides with everyday experience in nineteenth-century Russian social life, the interpretation of the story can be considered a lesson in critical thinking directed towards the extra-textual world.

I further presume that the exposure of the manipulated character of truth and of meaning through the construction of the nose as an ambiguous image is the central idea transmitted from “The Nose” to *Midnight’s Children*. While Gogol’s sensitivity towards the abuse of power and manipulation of signification was primarily motivated by his encounters with censorship, Rushdie’s novel draws upon the author’s experience and views of postcolonial India. Rushdie, living in a postmodern world, wrote a book depicting a collapse of the grand narrative constructed by British imperialism, which imposed its version of history and truth upon the Indian subcontinent for several decades. Nevertheless, the focal point of the author’s criticism lies in the postcolonial world of the Indian national state. The protagonist of *Midnight’s Children* witnesses the birth and rise of new grand narratives, such as the idea of India as a national state and the ideology of purity in Pakistan, fiercely competing for their existence. I suggest that the critique of the postcolonial governments in *Midnight’s Children* is, as in “The Nose,” directed towards the abuse of power. The intervention of power is used to construct privileged meanings and versions of reality, which follow the paradigms established and promoted by the governmental administration in charge of the nation at any given moment in history. I argue that to create a critique of such systems of rule, Rushdie utilizes and further develops the notion of ambiguity established as an essential feature of the olfactory by Gogol. In *Midnight’s Children*, the author broadens the olfactory category, including in it olfactory sensations. Connecting the olfactory with the function of memory, Rushdie’s text then effectively undermines the stability of the dominant narratives created by authority and power. Employing the olfactory as ambiguous

images and as a method of writing in Saleem's memoir, Rushdie undermines the reliability of the official versions of history. At the same time, the author uses the nose to interconnect the creative ambition of his protagonist with his desire for control to show that all individuals are susceptible to the power's allure.

My discussion of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Gogol's "The Nose" is informed by critical work on their fiction, and by scholarly studies concerning olfactory phenomena: these include physiognomic theory, research on the relationship between odor and memory, studies on the history of rhinoplasty and scholarly work investigating the social and literary perceptions of the olfactory in the course of human history. Based on my research I presume that in order to construct the nasal images in their texts, both authors drew upon contemporaneous knowledge concerning the olfactory and upon its previously codified literary uses. I therefore view Gogol's "The Nose," published in 1836, as historically conditioned by physiognomic theory, by nasal discourse following the development of rhinoplasty and also by the syphilitic epidemic in the end of the eighteenth century. In *Midnight's Children*, virtually no attention is given to the issues related to plastic surgery. The book, however, engages in a creative dialogue with physiognomy and draws on data and observations generated by scent theory. Additionally, both "The Nose" and *Midnight's Children* employ the olfactory imagery in a new, unconventional fashion, which takes advantage of the connotative properties of the nose. In this way, both authors construct the meaning of the olfactory as essentially ambiguous and producing multiple meanings and interpretations.

I open my thesis with a discussion of the relationship between the olfactory and the textual architectonics of “The Nose” and *Midnight’s Children*. In Chapter II, devoted to this topic, I argue that both authors create their narratives around the images of the nose and assign them a central position in the structure of both texts. Gogol’s short story, which plays out in a rather linear manner, depicts the olfactory quests of two protagonists, barber Yakovlevich and Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov. The nose troubles these men in a contrasting manner: Kovalyov searches for his missing nose in the streets of St. Petersburg, while Yakovlevich wanders through the city to dispose of the very same nose. Thus all of the episodes and incidents recounted in “The Nose” are, in fact, directly related to the image of the missing nose, which motivates them and moves the narrative forward.

As my discussion of *Midnight’s Children* will show, this narrative and the author’s application of nasal imagery are more complex. I propose that these distinctions can be accounted for by the genre and also by the different status of knowledge concerning the olfactory in the eras of Gogol and Rushdie. In this chapter I argue that the olfactory imagery is the very basis of Rushdie’s narrative method. Saleem’s autobiographic memoir is a retrospective account based entirely on his memory, stimulated by the familiar scents permeating his environment. Drawing on research on odor memory, I conclude that Rushdie employs olfactory imagery to develop a parallel between smelling and remembering. This move emphasizes unreliability and ambiguity, which, I argue, become important elements constituting the meaning of the text.

The connotative and ambiguous potential of the olfactory is also emphasized in Gogol's and Rushdie's engagement with physiognomic theory, interpreting the body, and especially human face, as a symbolic representation of the features inherent in the character of the scrutinized individual. As I argue in the third and fourth chapters, both authors develop their narratives on physiognomic foundations. Nevertheless, their attitude to these principles is not merely adoptive but rather adaptive. Both Gogol and Rushdie construct the olfactory organs of their protagonists as indicators of the protagonists' moral qualities, but at the same time use the ambiguity inherent to the nose to invest it with new readings. I propose that Gogol and Rushdie use the nose as an olfactory stethoscope, an image developed by Rushdie to emphasize the indicative properties of the nose. The images of the nose then operate in "The Nose" and in *Midnight's Children* as diagnostic tools sniffing out the status of the protagonists' minds and of the social climate they inhabit.

The third chapter of my thesis provides a detailed analysis of the image of the missing nose in Gogol's short story. In accordance with physiognomic principles and on the basis of nasal discourse circulating in nineteenth-century, literate Russian society, I suggest that the absence of the nose can be interpreted either as a sign of honor or dishonor, depending on the presence or absence of the scar. I propose that the unscarred face of Kovalyov can be interpreted as a sign of moral corruption and sexual promiscuity due to its allusions to syphilitic nose. Gogol's text also conveys that corruption and moral decay are, next to the manipulation of meaning, among the main diseases infecting his society. The Assessor's encounters with the representatives of various social groups,

which take place during his olfactory retrieval quest, expose the corrupt status of these individuals, who take advantage of their higher position on the social ladder. They exploit loopholes in the bureaucratic system and manipulate their environment, just like Kovalyov does, and abuse their power in relation to the individuals who are staged at the lower steps within the social hierarchy. In this way, Gogol employs the image of the missing nose to articulate an ironic assessment not of specific individuals but of character types, representing particular professions prone to the disease of corruption. “The Nose,” frequently employing the image of a mirror, thus becomes an angled mirror, which through the bodily distortion reflects the crooked and decaying status of social ethics.

As I discuss in Chapter IV, Rushdie’s novel also develops its own nosology, established through the application of the olfactory stethoscope to the body of Saleem, and through him to his social and especially political environment. Even in case of the physiognomic readings of the nose, Rushdie’s text endorses the images of the olfactory as ambiguous. The narrative, on one hand, validates the physiognomic assessment of the nose and of human body, and on the other hand challenges its infallibility and credibility. Rushdie shows that it is, just like any other construction of meaning, a result of interpretation, prone to the projections of subjective viewpoints and manipulation.

The novel characterizes its protagonists through their noses, but these descriptions come from the pen of Saleem, who is familiar with the character traits of his relatives and can imprint them deliberately into the olfactory organs. The narrator also takes advantage of physiognomic theory to depict an incident providing a reading of his

face, which confirms the interconnectedness between Saleem and India proclaimed at the very beginning of the story. Other readings of Saleem's nose, however, undermine the previously suggested interpretations. As Saleem shows, his mother misread his nose, when she mistook it for a sign confirming his belonging to the lineage of Aadam Aziz. Saleem's olfactory organ thus undermines the significance of blood relations and of the notions of patriarchal lineage and dynasty, which are at the same time dominant features of Indian politics. In this way, the physiognomic misreading conveys an implicit critique of the government's legitimacy and power abuse.

In this chapter I also suggest that *Midnight's Children* draws upon and reinvents the phallic connotations inscribed into the olfactory through physiognomic and literary tradition. Even in this case, Rushdie's approach to the olfactory-phallic parallel is experimental. He first constructs the nose as a powerful phallic image only to undermine it later in the text by the act of castration, which completely disrupts the correspondence between the shape and length of the olfactory organ and Saleem's virility and sexual activity. I propose that the phallic allusions of Saleem's nose have a different purpose than to point to his sexuality. They uncover another element belonging into olfactory nosology: they reveal the social taboos of children's, parental and extramarital, incestuous and promiscuous sexuality. The suppression of their existence is another example of the selective approach to reality and manipulation of facts and meanings.

In the final part of the chapter I show how the author reinvents the phallic readings of the nose by substituting the procreative with creative power. The process of writing through the nose is connected, as it is to be discussed in detail in Chapter VI, to the

notions of meaning construction, meaning manipulation and to the issues of control and power abuse. All of these are also addressed through the phallic connotation of the nose, which depicts childhood not as a romantic period of initiation, but as a painful, confusing experience, during which the individual is vulnerable and subjected to adult's control. In *Midnight's Children*, childhood is the beginning of a struggle for self-definition, social recognition and acceptance. As Saleem's abuse of his olfactory-telepathic ability shows, growing up is also a process through which one strives to acquire control and begins to learn that it is possible to exert influence over the lives of other people. Saleem's creative activity is then an ultimate claim of control over his life, a life that has always been a center of the intersecting power zones of national politics and private lives. His genealogical narrative, based on the ambiguous images of the olfactory, is also a process of meaning construction. In this way, ambiguity in *Midnight's Children* installed through olfactory images discerns the processes of interpretation and manipulation as interconnected processes that participate in the creation and implementation of the socially approved meanings in the literary and extra-literary worlds.

In Chapter V, I suggest that both "The Nose" and *Midnight's Children* conceive of olfactory imagery as essentially ambiguous. In my analysis of "The Nose" I propose that Gogol underlines the dubious nature of the nose by the lexical pun conveyed in the Russian word *nos*, or nose. When read backwards, the Russian word *nos* spells *son*, or dream.³ The fluidity of the word nose in Russian is conducive to the text's oscillation between the mimetic depiction of reality and the realm of dreams. I further argue that

Gogol uses the notion of the missing nose to attract readers' attention to the permeable boundary between reality and fantasy. The images of the missing nose operate on both denotative and connotative levels. They incite the readers' imagination to associate nasal images with different readings and thus make the text operate on more than one level of meaning.

In Chapter VI, I analyze the way in which olfactory imagery constitutes meaning in *Midnight's Children*. I argue that Rushdie employed the olfactory images to emphasize the notion of ambiguity as an inherent feature of reality and to challenge a dichotomizing categorization and conceptualization of reality. In *Midnight's Children*, olfactory imagery destabilizes the reliability of the narrative and subverts a moral dichotomy to articulate an alternative world view, in which meaning is not fixed but crystallizes as a result of negotiation and interpretation. In Rushdie's fictional universe, there is no place for metanarratives in Lyotard's sense of the word;⁴ it is a world of conflicting discourses competing for prominence, a world, where meaning is assigned on the basis of a particular perspective. Yet *Midnight's Children* suggests that no truth and no meaning is absolute and universal, but subject to manipulation and exercise of power and control. As the text proposes, individuals, epitomized in the novel by Saleem, tend to situate themselves in the center of their personal narratives, organizing facts and events according to their personal experience and ideology. Utilizing the notion of interconnectedness of the private and the public, Rushdie's text suggests that Saleem's approach to facts and history, is also exercised by the governments of India and Pakistan. They consist of individuals who, just like Saleem, have not only their own

ambitions, viewpoints, but also the power to impose their views and readings of facts and events upon the rest of the nation, authorizing them and presenting them as the reality. The metaphorical and ambiguous nature of the olfactory, challenging the reliability of Saleem's narrative, points to the elusive and slippery nature of reality, which is open to manipulation and interpretation, and allows for the construction of meaning in various types of discourse, such as autobiography, history and politics.

NOTES

¹ An on-line BBC report from October 2002, fittingly entitled “Gogol’s Nose Goes” covered the event. The author of the statue, Vyacheslav Bukharev, responded to the incident in a rather jovial manner. He already considered the possibility of making a new nose for the city, one that would be more like the nose in the short story. The nose depicted by Gogol walking down the streets had a wart on it, a detail that escaped to his attention when he made the stolen statue. The incident is amusing for its parallel between reality and fiction. The story as well as the incident take place in St. Petersburg, a city that is to Russians mysterious and surreal. The reality matched Gogol’s story also in the strangeness of the incident. The theft of a huge marble statue made to the police as little sense as Gogol’s story to some of the critics, who sought for its explanations.

² Although I claim that the employment of the olfactory imagery in Gogol’s “The Nose” amounts to an effective social critique, I do not have in mind a Marxist viewpoint, applied to Gogol’s work by Soviet critics. In my discussion, I analyze a phenomenon, neither historically nor culturally specific, the governmental manipulation of meaning.

³ The transliteration of Russian words follows the guidelines suggested in J. Thomas Shaw’s *The Transliteration of Modern Russian for English-Language Publications*. Throughout this thesis, the Russian words will be transliterated in accordance with System III, which is “the international scholarly system for the transliteration of Russian, used by linguists and literary scholars specializing in Russian and Slavic studies” (Shaw 5). The same system is used in the examples provided in Gibaldi’s *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (95).

⁴ The term grand narratives was coined by J. F. Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* to label the dominant narratives of modernity and progress as constructed texts that collapse under the pressure of the postmodern disillusioned world view.

CHAPTER II

THE STRUCTURING OLFACTORY

Conducting a comparative analysis of the narrative structure in “The Nose” and in *Midnight’s Children* one might presume that such investigation would produce a list of differences rather than similarities. The two works, separated by time gap of nearly one hundred and fifty years and conditioned by different literary and social contexts, also represent two structurally different genres: a short story and a novel. Indeed, Rushdie, writing a postmodern text, followed a contemporary trend when he selected a more intricate narrative method, while for Gogol, whose work is generally classified as a contribution to Russian naturalism in fiction, the linear narrative was an obvious choice. Yet I propose that in spite of their differences both works show two compositional affinities; their narrative structures correspond to the content they relate and both texts employ olfactory images as central developing and structuring devices.¹

My discussion of “The Nose” shows that Gogol uses the image of the missing nose to create a linear narrative, depicting the olfactory quests of two protagonists, barber Yakovlevich and Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov. Likewise, Rushdie employs the olfactory organ of the novel’s protagonist and narrator Saleem to recount or sniff out a series of nasally related incidents, the abundance of which reflects the parallelism between Saleem’s life and the multinational state of India. Drawing upon the scholarly discussion of narrative structure in *Midnight’s Children* I further argue that olfactory images are intertwined with the narrative method. I suggest that the episodes in the novel

are recounted in an essentially linear manner and that the olfactory imagery serves in the book as a cohesive element and a mnemonic device, permeating the text with its omnipresence and facilitating the readers' orientation within the recounted anecdotal jungle.

Gogol's short story preconceives the centrality of the olfactory imagery in its title. The author based his narrative upon an incident of olfactory disappearance, which gave rise to the image of the missing nose. The olfactory image then motivates a series of anecdotes and becomes a driving force of the narrative. It creates a foundation for two overlapping narrative lines involving the barber Ivan Yakovlevich and the Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov. The author places both men in awkward and antithetical predicaments; the barber is baffled by the presence of Kovalyov's nose in his loaf of bread, while the Assessor is stunned and flung into despair when he discovers his olfactory organ's absence. This morning episode is a starting point for their nasally motivated quests, which aim at opposite goals. Henpecked Yakovlevich strives to dispose of the unwanted object, while Kovalyov throws himself into a desperate search aimed at restoration of his original facial appearance.

Dispatching the barber and the Assessor into the streets of St. Petersburg, Gogol structures his story along the lines of their nasally motivated journey. The missing olfactory organ incurs amusing incidents, depicting the protagonists' interaction with their environment. These are presented in sequence as they occurred, with only slight temporal overlap in the opening of the narrative. The linear structure of the story thus matches its content, recounting Kovalyov's and Yakovlevich's olfactory quests.

From the structural point of view, “The Nose” is a tight and enclosed text, in which olfactory imagery fulfills two central roles. It operates as the activating and driving force of the narrative, spurring the protagonist’s actions, and at the same time, the image of the missing nose functions as a cohesive element, which ties together the otherwise independent anecdotes constitutive of the text.

The olfactory management in *Midnight’s Children* takes place in a similar manner. This novel, like “The Nose,” is structured anecdotally and episodically. Rushdie connects episodes by weaving olfactory images into the complex and intricate narrative structure of his novel.² The majority of the episodes in the text is presented retrospectively, as Saleem’s memory orders the recollections into a linear sequence. This diachronic line is intersected with Saleem’s metanarrative and self-reflexive comments, repeatedly reminding the readers of the author’s presence and his viewpoint, rooted in the present.

Saleem’s parenthetical interlocations, grafted by the author onto the body of the main narrative, are written by a method which Damian Grant fittingly calls “tessellation” (39). He characterized *Midnight Children*’s narrative style “after the way tiles are laid to overlap on a roof, whereby the narrative is always looping back in recapitulation, and also soaking forward (‘proleptically’) in anticipation” (Grant 39). As a result, the recounting technique “bring[s] depth of field to the present moment, creating an impression of simultaneity and temporal suspension – as the fluid present, the elusive now, is always pressed on by past and foreshadowed, drawn forward into the future” (Grant 39). Yet these textual passages created through tessellation are concentrated

solely in Saleem's parenthetical commentary and do not necessarily penetrate into the remaining textual environment. I suggest that the rest of the narrative is composed in an essentially linear manner, presenting a retrospective account of three successive generations of Saleem's family and of the process of Saleem's development from the moment of his birth, through puberty and into adulthood.

The autobiographical narrative in *Midnight's Children* grows and spreads, accumulating various episodes, anecdotes, and brief summaries of historical events. It produces a swelling text, resembling the luxuriant vegetation of the Sundarbarn jungle and reflects Saleem's conviction that his body became in the moment of his birth interconnected with the history of the Indian national state. Saleem summarizes the idea with following words: "I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come" (348). *Midnight's Children* thus articulates a specific concept of an individual life, which is viewed as a compilation of past, present and future events. Saleem's autobiography therefore contains stories, anecdotes and incidents involving his family, friends, acquaintances, children of midnight, politicians and virtually anybody who has ever crossed his path. The abundance of characters and events intervening in Saleem's life, then, correlates with the multicolored and multifarious life of the Indian state.

Nevertheless, the fragmented and anecdotal character of the text does not necessarily produce a non-linear narrative. The episodes are structured on essentially diachronic lines, interrupted only by Saleem's tessellated parenthetical commentary.

I therefore propose that the text of *Midnight's Children* oscillates between the tendency towards fragmentation and the tendency towards precisely structured and controlled narration. The author favors the firm, organized architectonics over the alternative of dispersed clusters of narrative elements. I suggest that in spite of the rhetoric devices introducing into the text the feeling of fragmentation and disintegration, the author creates a text with a high degree of coherence and organization. He grafts the digressive elements upon the linear body of the main narrative and interweaves the text with recurrent images and metaphors that guide the reader through the labyrinth of storytelling.

In his discussion of rhetorical devices in *Midnight's Children*, Toril Swan points out that Rushdie's text employs metaphorical images in a "innovative and coherent" manner (121). He also identifies two of the novel's "superordinate, controlling metaphors," the midnight's children and the pickle jars (Swan 121). The nasal image functions in a similar fashion. Uma Parameswaran argues that recurrent images and metaphors participate in the novel's narrative method. Her analysis focuses on the perforated sheet: the image, loaded with cultural references, becomes a metaphor for India with its "lack of unity" and shapes the way the narrative is presented (Parameswaran 44).³

Parameswaran claims that due to the abundance of stories to tell, “Saleem (and Rushdie) [...] use Lifafa Das’s peepshow method, showing successive scenes through a hole” (45). Unlike Grant’s image, which emphasizes the overlapping of anecdotes, Parameswaran’s perforated sheet image presents the novel as a series of discrete episodes. The critic, however, also points out that “Rushdie leaves a trail of direct and indirect references to the perforated sheet” through the novel (Parameswaran 45). In this way the author creates a network of events, episodes and characters clustered around the image, which connects them into a image-structured whole. Parameswaran’s pertinent observations clearly show that Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* intertwines the semantic and structural dimensions of the text with the narrative method through which it is brought into existence.

Analyzing the role of the olfactory images in the novel, I propose that Parameswaran’s focus on the perforated sheet is by extension applicable to the role of noses and scents in *Midnight’s Children*.⁴ I thereby propose that the olfactory images are employed in Rushdie’s text as vehicles of signification, as I discuss in the next chapter, and as metaphors permeating the narrative with a network of allusions and associations, increasing the novel’s textual cohesion.

Borrowing from the metaphorical language of Rushdie’s novel, I describe the structural role of the olfactory images in the text as one of snakes and ladders. The expression, used in *Midnight’s Children* as a metaphor for ambiguity, can through its spatial dimension metaphorically describe the narrative function of the nasal images in the text. The metaphor is based on a table game for children, where ladders allow a

player to progress in the game, while stepping upon a snake results in their slide down and regression into the earlier stages of the competition. In *Midnight's Children*, the image of the nose fulfills the role of the ladder, since it is the driving and motivating force of the narrative. It also functions as a snake, when it reminds the readers of contexts and episodes, which were recounted earlier and also contained olfactory imagery.

In the beginning of *Midnight's Children*, the nose is primarily a material object, a part of the face of Aadam Aziz, Saleem's grandfather, but as the story continues, the nose becomes endowed with other than olfactory powers. It is established as an indispensable characterizing element engaged in the description of almost every figure in the novel. The olfactory organ of the main character (just like the nose of Kovalyov in Gogol's "The Nose") actually motivates many of the actions carried out by Saleem, and on numerous occasions also stimulates the actions affecting shaping the future progress of his life. The image of the nose thus runs like a thread through the whole narrative and ties together otherwise incoherent series of episodes and anecdotes. Finally, olfactory imagery is constantly detectable on the surface of the text because Saleem uses his nose as a tool to construct the narrative.⁵ His olfactory organ is endowed with extraordinary ability to travel across the boundaries of time and sniff out the secrets and events of the past.

The structural function of the olfactory is further highlighted by the deliberate and perpetual foregrounding of its presence at numerous occasions in the text. In the course of the narrative process, Rushdie transforms the nose into a multivalent recurring

image, interweaving the narrative with a dense referential and connotative network. As a result, the image of the nose functions as an adhesive, gluing together the diverse and episodic texture of the novel. Apart from contributing to the textual cohesion, the olfactory images also function in relation to the readers of the novel as a mnemonic device. It contains and carries the ‘memory’ of the events and contexts in which it had been previously employed and like a snake in the game has the power to transport the reader into the earlier stages of the narrative by advancing their recall.

Scholarly research, investigating the relationship between memory and metaphoric images shows that “complex metaphoric representations are encoded as part of people’s internal, long-term memory systems” (Gibbs 152). Rushdie’s construction of the olfactory as a mnemonic device is a particularly effective step that facilitates orientation within the text of the novel and at the same time reenacts the effect of tessellation. The nasal allusions and references link together the textual past and present, blending in the boundaries between the two. Through this effect of multiple overlapping, the olfactory images make Saleem’s life into a compilation of intersecting synchronic and diachronic aggregates of individual experience, social interaction, personal and national histories.

The stories of Saleem and Kovalyov, then, can be read as nasally-motivated retrieval quests. While the protagonist of “The Nose” travels through the streets of St. Petersburg in search of his olfactory organ, Saleem Sinai travels down the mnemonic paths to recover the memories of the distant past. Both authors utilize the images of the nose as constitutive and structuring elements of their texts, which they organize into a network of nasally-related episodes, incidents and characters. In “The Nose” the linear

narrative with a single temporal overlap and minimal authorial intrusions corresponds to the notion of a quest it conveys. In *Midnight's Children*, the olfactory functions as an cohesive device, which through its connection with the narrative technique of tessellation, overlaps multiple narrative dimensions. In this way the olfactory images also support and perform Saleem's philosophy of all-encompassing structure of an individual's life. The olfactory images therefore function as central elements developing the narrative structure of both *Midnight's Children* and "The Nose." As I propose in the next two chapters, both Gogol and Rushdie also build their narratives around the semantic dimension of the olfactory. Utilizing their connotative potential, they establish the nasally related images as vehicles of ambiguity and instability of meaning, which they use as the chief device to critique power abuse, producing dominant and semantically narrow narratives.

NOTES

¹ The difference in the works' genre causes a proportional misbalance in this chapter. Due to its complex narrative structure, more space is devoted to the discussion of *Midnight's Children*, while the section on "The Nose" is substantially shorter. As my discussion shows, Gogol did not experiment so much with the structure of his text, but rather with its semantic aspects. Consequently, the following chapters of my thesis, discussing the use of the olfactory images in the construction of meaning in "The Nose" and in *Midnight's Children*, will distribute the space equally between both works.

² The narrative style of *Midnight's Children* was analyzed by several scholars: M. Keith Booker, Damian Grant, Catherine Cundy and Nancy E. Batty, unanimously agree that the novel's narrative is presented in a non-linear manner. M. Keith Booker proposes that Rushdie presents his narrative "through the use of nonlinear narrative modes," which are "presumably derived, if one accepts [Rushdie's] own testimony, from the characteristic forms of Indian oral culture" (Booker 288). In Booker's view, the purpose of such narrative technique is the creation of a narrative, which would not be based on colonizing modes of expression. The similarities between Rushdie's narrative method and the techniques of an oral storyteller are also registered in Cundy's study of *Midnight's Children*. The question of oral narrative methodology is further illuminated in the analysis of Nancy E. Batty, which proposes that the perception of the novel as an orally presented narrative is suggested by the text's depiction of the interaction between the narrator Saleem and his surrogate reader/listener, Padma. Batty further proposes that the non-linear narrative techniques are designed to create suspense and entertain the novel's readers. In her view, the "criterion which may be applied to the successful creation of suspense is that of duration between promise and fulfillment" (Batty 71) and Rushdie's narrative method, described by Damian Grant as "tessellation" (39), effectively accomplishes this goal.

³ The anecdotal, fragmented character of the novel promoted through the image of the perforated sheet corresponds to the process of political fragmentation, affecting the country. The narrative depicts the disintegration of the British Empire bringing independence to India, the separation of Pakistan from India, and eventually the declaration of independence by the Pakistan's eastern wing, Bangladesh. Moreover, adhering to the logic of "being handcuffed to history" (Rushdie 9), Saleem's body also undergoes a process of fragmentation. As the narrative develops, the narrator reports the progressive disruption of his body, leading towards its complete disintegration.

⁴ Parameswaran also refers in her study of Rushdie's metaphors to the images of leaking, pickling and chutney making. Her assessment of the role of noses is very brief, limited to a brief assessment that "Rushdie squeezes dry almost every denotation and connotation of words, phrases and idioms associated with nose. Saleem lives by his nose sniffing out people and then the correct combinations of pickling ingredients for his living. He has a nose for details, pokes his nose into others' affairs" (Parameswaran 54).

⁵ Rushdie's use of the olfactory as a constitutive part of the narrative method will be addressed in detail in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER III

OLFACTORY DESCRIPTIONS IN “THE NOSE”

In addition to the structural function discussed in Chapter II, the olfactory plays a key role in the constitution of meaning in both “The Nose” and *Midnight’s Children*. In Chapters III and IV, I discuss how Gogol and Rushdie develop the nose as a metaphorical image with the inherent feature of ambiguity and how they use it as a tool to diagnose the status of social ethics and the governmental abuse of power in relation to signification and truth.

In Rushdie’s novel, the text is dominated by the overwhelming presence of Saleem’s nose and by its receptive function, while in Gogol’s story the main character suffers from his nose’s absence. When juxtaposed in this way, the protagonist’s noses create two poles of a presence-absence dichotomy, but their role in the text is anything but dichotomy-promoting. In both works, the noses represent more than a sensory receptor registering and responding to olfactory stimuli. Their role is, as I discuss in this thesis, to perpetuate the notion of ambiguity throughout the whole body of the text. Constructing noses as images, operating on metaphorical level and drawing attention to cloaked meanings, “The Nose” and *Midnight’s Children*, each in its own special way, draw upon the physiognomic tradition, which postulates a relationship between physical properties of the body and the moral profile of each individual. Yet, neither Gogol nor Rushdie settle for a mere adoption of this equation, articulated originally by Aristotle, and then modified and diversified by generations of physiognomists in the course of

several centuries.¹ I suggest that “The Nose” and *Midnight’s Children* present creative adaptations, and in case of Rushdie’s novel also a subversion, of the traditional physiognomic beliefs concerning the human olfactory organ.

The transformation of the nose into an image communicating a message about the specificities of the character of its owner has been well documented by several scholars preoccupied with the study of physiognomic theories as such and with their reception in fiction.² On its trajectory that can be traced from the ancient times to the late nineteenth century through physiognomic studies and through the work of fiction that draw upon the physiognomic observations and concepts in the characterization of their protagonists, the olfactory organ has acquired two basic metaphorical connotations. Equating beauty and symmetry of the nose to goodness and high class and ugliness to villainy and low class, physiognomic theorists transformed the nose into an image reflecting social status and moral dispositions. It also became an image with a particular “sexual valence” (Davis 82).

In his study of nasal images in literature, Davis points out that the shape and location of the nose “make it a natural phallic symbol, although our notion of “symbol” hardly does justice to the symbiotic connection that was believed to exist between the nose and the sexual organs” (Davis 82). The phallic connotations were clearly inscribed on the nose by Giovan Battista della Porta, who in his *De humana physiognomonia*, published in 1586, conveyed that “the nose corresponds to the ‘rod,’ that is the penis” (qtd. in Davis 82). Therefore “whoever has the one long and big, or pointed and big, or short, the same may be judged of the other; likewise the nostrils correspond to the

testicles. Men who are especially virile are called “nasuti” (big noses)” (qtd. in Davis 82). This reading was then passed down through centuries in other physiognomic studies, which were, as Tytler and Davis point out, still influential and respected in the nineteenth century.

The inscription of the sexual on the olfactory was further intensified in the beginning of the twentieth century in psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Fliess. Freud “saw a connection between the sublimation of the sense of smell and sexual repression” and Fliess articulated the idea that there is a reciprocal relationship between the nose and (fe)male genitalia (Le Guérer 12).

Several literary scholars find the psychoanalytical theorizing of the nose appealing and employ it to resolve the olfactory enigma of “The Nose.” Spycher’s Freudian reading explains the story as a dream of a sexually dysfunctional male, Kovalyov, who “is unwilling and unable either to surrender to the total experience of true spiritual and physical heterosexual love or to renounce it resolutely and perhaps humbly; he only plays with love, he only tries to appear to be a lover, and only a status-seeking lover at that” (Spycher 367). Yermakov on the other hand argues that Kovalyov “exists entirely in and of his exhibitionistic sexual activity. His life is devoted exclusively to sex: he runs after women and displays himself” (Yermakov 178). The psychoanalytical approach transgresses the boundaries of fiction: these scholars tend to analyze the text not as an autonomous unit but as another ‘dream,’ a projection of Gogol’s own impotence complex suggested by Yermakov and Spycher, or latent homosexuality claimed by Karlinsky.

The projection of biographical data into Gogol's story, as it is performed by the above mentioned critics, is not entirely unsubstantiated, since Gogol indeed was a rather olfactory-conscious individual. In his biographically oriented study of Gogol's work, Vladimir Nabokov provides an amusing characteristic of Gogol's olfactory organ. "His big sharp nose," he writes, "was of such length and mobility that in the days of his youth he had been able (being something of an amateur contortionist), to bring its tip and his underlip in ghoulish contact; this nose was his keenest and most essential outer part" (Nabokov 3). Although Gogol would himself occasionally comment on his nose in his letters to friends and employ the olfactory organ in nearly every description of his fiction's protagonists, Nabokov hesitates to accept the Freudian interpretation of Gogol's writing, rejecting the suggestion that "in Gogol's topsy-turvy world human beings are turned upside down [...] so that the part of the nose is played by some other organ and vice-versa" (Nabokov 4). While Gogol did utilize the phallic connotations of the nose in his short story, readers profit from Nabokov's reserved attitude concerning the psychoanalytical readings and his refusal to deduce conclusions concerning the writer's sexual life and orientation from works of fiction.

Even though Freudian analysis, unlike physiognomic theory, provides an interpretation of the image of the missing nose, I suggest that the explanation for Gogol's fascination with the olfactory organs, whether missing or present in their natural location, should be sought in places other than the author's private life. The answer to the riddle of "The Nose" lies, as I will show, not only in physiognomic readings of the human body, but also in the socio-historical and cultural climate within which the story

was composed. In this respect, the most relevant discussions of Gogol's "The Nose" were presented in Nabokov's *Nikolai Gogol* and in Vinogradov's extensive study *Siuzhet i kompozitsiia povesti Gogolia "Nos."*

In reaction to psychoanalytical approaches, Nabokov claims that he finds it "more reasonable to forget that Gogol's exaggerated concern with noses was based on the fact of his own being abnormally long and to treat Gogol's olfactivism – and even his nose – as a literary trick allied to the broad humor of carnivals in general and to Russian humor in particular" (4). He supports his contention with an entertaining compilation from Russian proverbs and sayings employing the olfactory organ as an image. "We are nose-gay and nose-sad," he writes,

We hang [our noses] in dejection, we lift it up in glory; slack memory is advised to make a notch in it and it is wiped for you by your victor. It is used as a measure of length when referring to some impending event of more or less threatening nature. We speak of leading somebody by it or leaving somebody with it more than other nations do. The drowsy man "angles" with it instead of nodding. A big one is said to bridge the Volga or to have been growing for a century. A tingle inside it portends a piece of good news while a pimple of its tip means a coming carouse. (Nabokov 4)

Nabokov's rich account of the nasally-associated folklore shows that the olfactory organ always stimulated people's imagination and was routinely perceived as an image conveying the connotations of deception, delusion and inquisitiveness. Gogol's

increased olfactory awareness therefore was not a peculiar feature of his personality, but should be understood as symptomatic of an interpretative undercurrent shared among the general Russian public.³ Therefore, writing “The Nose,” the author could draw on cultural and discursive traditions and assume that his work would be received by an ‘olfactory-sensitive’ audience, long accustomed to the multivalent and ambiguous nature of the olfactory imagery.

Yet the tradition of nasal folklore and humor was not the only source of inspiration for Gogol. As V. V. Vinogradov found through his extensive research in nineteenth-century journals and newspapers, Gogol’s contemporary society were absorbed in a lively discussion concerning noses. The newspapers contained *otdel nosologii*, or a section on noses, which was a compendium consisting of treaties, articles, anecdotes and more importantly, “novell[i] o poxo ždenijax nosacej” “‘short stories about the adventures of people with large noses’ and “panegerik[i] nosu, v kotoryx pateticeski vyjasnilos’ znacenie nosa dlja celoveka” “‘panegyrics on the nose, which, employing pathos, explain the immense significance of the nose for every person’ (Vinogradov 13). Humor and irony permeating the discourse, and the motives and themes that were recounted in such articles did not necessarily originate in the traditional olfactory roots, but their authors drew inspiration from other contemporaneous literary and non-literary sources.

Vinogradov proposes that the olfactory discussion flourishing in the newspapers in Gogol’s days was influenced by the Russian translation of Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy*, which was published in six volumes in the years 1804-1807 and employed nasal

imagery in its text in a playful manner.⁴ The critic's research suggests that "The Nose," as well as the newspaper articles, employed in their account of olfactory incidents the physiognomic principles interpreting the body as a reflection of the moral profile and character traits of the respective individual. The dominant notion of such body readings was the connection emphasizing the relationship between man's nose and his honor. Vinogradov's otherwise detailed overview of olfactory journalism, however, does not explain in greater detail why Russian society would pay such intense attention to the matter of the nose, and why the presence or absence of the nose was associated with honor. I believe that this question can be answered with the insights provided by nineteenth-century nasal discourse and by rhinoplasty, a surgical field that in Gogol's times attracted the attention of the general public and inspired a variety of anecdotes, with the rhinoplastic patient as a protagonist.⁵

While contemporary surgical interventions on the nose are readily associated with a desire to achieve an esthetic and pleasing image of the self, in the nineteenth century, the implications of rhinoplasty extended far beyond the aesthetic. Plastic surgery on the nose was largely pursued not to improve the organ's shape and looks but to camouflage its disintegration. Vinogradov's discussion indicates that the nineteenth-century articles discussed the new techniques of rhinoplasty, imported by plastic surgeons from the colonized Indian subcontinent. As Sander Gilman observes in his overview of the history of plastic surgery, reconstructive rhinoplasty developed in the East as a consequence of a penal system that used the traditional form of punishment, which lay in cutting off noses of thieves, deserters, and adulterers. Yet in the culturally

different nineteenth-century Russia nasal amputation was not a common practice and therefore the amputated olfactory organ must have had other signification.

My research in the history of plastic surgery and rhinoplasty suggests that in Western and Westernized cultures the relationship of a missing nose to man's honor can be established in two ways: the absent olfactory organ is either a sign of honor or dishonor, and its reading depends on the manner by which the loss was inflicted upon the individual. Thus, even in the context of plastic surgery, the nose crystallizes as an bivalent sign open to double evaluation and interpretation. I propose that writing "The Nose," Gogol utilized the ambiguous potential that the missing olfactory organ offers and constructed a narrative based on physiognomic principles but at the same time operating on at least two levels of meanings.

As Sander Gilman states in his study on the history of rhinoplasty, injuries to the nose, amputations and scarring of various body parts could be suffered under honorable circumstances, in combat, fighting for one's country in wars, or defending one's honor in duels. Wars and duels were considered manly undertakings and body scars acquired in this manner would consequently be perceived as a mark of honor, not a stigma.

Kovalyov is certainly aware of the privileges and implications of having a scar, when he laments that "Bud' ja bez ruki ili bez nogi – vse by èto lucše; bud' ja bez ušej - skverno [...] no bez nosa celovek = cert znaet cto: ptica ne ptica, graždanin ne graždanin, - prosto vozmi da i vyšvyrni za okoško" 'if only [he] had lost an arm or a leg – it would have been far better; or even [his] ears – that would have been hard [...] but without a nose a man is nothing: neither man nor beast, but God knows what! Just some rubbish to be

thrown out of window' and he wishes his nose "i pust' by uže na vojne otrubili, ili na dueli" 'had been hacked off in the war or in a duel' (Gogol, "Nos" 184; Gogol, "The Nose" 51). Obviously, the Assessor would gladly accept the loss of other body parts and even of the nose; he bemoans the fact that his face does not show any sign of scarring. The absence or presence of a scar determines the social perception of his missing olfactory organ, implying whether the nose should be read as a mark of honor or of stigma. Kovalyov knows that without the redeeming scar, his disfigurement would be interpreted socially in an unfavorable way. Such empty space could be read as a symptom of a venereal disease and therefore signify sexually promiscuous behavior, moral corruption, and lack of honor.

The research of Glaser and Gilman confirms that the development of plastic surgery in Europe was stimulated by different social needs than in India; it was "rooted in the appearance of epidemic syphilis" at the end of the sixteenth century (Gilman 10). Also the innovative technique of rhinoplasty using a skin graft from the patient's forehead to restore the missing nose discussed in the early nineteenth century newspapers did not stir the public interest for its relationship to war injuries or duels. Instead, this operative technique was perceived as a new method restoring noses of syphilitic patients. As Glaser explains, in the end of the eighteenth century, "Europe was in the midst of a syphilis epidemic, and noses were obvious casualties of the disease. The infection attacked the soft tissue of the nose, causing the bridge to collapse, or worse, leaving a gaping hole in the middle of the face. It was a public marker of private behavior, even branding sons and daughters with the sins of their parents" (Glaser 220).

Due to its congenital and biological character, the consequences of the end-of-century syphilitic epidemic would certainly be felt in the 1830s, when Gogol wrote and published “The Nose.”

Although Kovalyov does not have a hole in his face, but “preglupoe, rovnoe i gladkoe mesto” ‘a ridiculous, empty, smooth space’ (Gogol, “Nos” 172; Gogol, “The Nose” 41), I argue that the syphilitic nose is precisely the notion that is alluded to in Gogol’s short story, although the author does not construct the missing olfactory organ as a denotative referent. The writer’s letters indicate that the idea of contracting a venereal disease was amongst his greatest fears. Gogol reproached his mother, who inaccurately suspected that the writer traveled to Europe because he contracted such a disease and defended himself with passionate words:

How mama? You could even think that I am the prey of vile debauchery, that I am on the lowest level of human degradation! Finally, you dared attribute to me a disease the thought of which always made even my very thoughts tremble [...] It seemed to me that I was hearing a curse. How could you think that the son of such angel-parents could be a monster in which not one speck of virtue remained! (Gogol, *Letters* 35)

Then, further elaborating on his expression of disdain for and fear of promiscuous behavior, Gogol proclaimed that he would “never transgress the sacred rules of virtue which have been ineffaceably engraved in [his] heart” (*Letters* 36).⁶ In another letter, addressed to A. S. Danilevsky, who had admitted that he spent the night with a woman of ill repute, Gogol expresses his dismay over his friend’s irresponsible sexual behavior. Warning him of the possible consequences, he writes: “what if she slaps you with a case of Then both the marriage and the sugar factory will suffer strongly. But let’s put troubled thoughts aside” (Gogol, *Letters* 75). Interestingly, the words denoting a

venereal disease are in the text censored, indicating that an open discussion of sexuality and especially of its darker aspects and consequences was in Gogol's day a social taboo.⁷ Therefore, in order to secure the publication of his story, Gogol had to lead the censors by the nose and conjure a mist of ambiguity and fantastic to disguise the sexual implications of the missing nose in his text. I view censorship and the socially constructed taboos restricting the freedom of expressions on both literary and general, public level as the main reasons for employing the nose as a metaphorical image. The imprecise, ambiguous description of the nose, which eludes explanation as to the causes of the olfactory deficit, and the anthropomorphous features that the olfactory organ acquires after its detachment from Kovalyov's face is, above all, Gogol's strategy to evade censorship. The Assessor's nose becomes a surreal figure traveling in the city streets dressed in a uniform, praying in a cathedral and talking, makes the story look like a grotesque fantasy, a dream with no solid foundation in the nineteenth-century Russian reality. Yet in spite of the supernatural and implausible character of the olfactory experience in "The Nose," I propose that the referential point of Gogol's short story is the syphilitic nose. My close reading of the text will show that the author integrates the image into the text in such way that the incidents in which it is involved gradually intensify the hints suggesting syphilis and sexual promiscuity as possible causes of Kovalyov's misfortune. The allusions to the matters of honor, to the relationship between Kovalyov's missing nose and women, and finally to sexual misconduct and health deficiency develop and grow stronger as Kovalyov's olfactory quest progresses.

These allusions at the same time increase the readers' awareness of the dubious nature of the olfactory image and of its connotative dimension.

Appalled by the disappearance of his olfactory organ, the Assessor seeks help and walks down the street “zakryvši platkom lico, pokazyvaja vid, kak budto u nego šla krov” ‘with a handkerchief over his face, like someone with a nosebleed’ (Gogol, “Nos” 173; Gogol “The Nose” 41), hiding the real nature of his problem from the eager and judging eyes of the public. The narrator, however, draws attention to ill health as a possible explanation for Assessor's troubles, when he interprets Kovalyov's behavior as a conduct of a man suffering from a nosebleed. One disease, without any moral implications, cloaks another in order to minimize the exposure of the individual to immediate social judgement.

The fear of social exclusion is easily detectable in the course of Kovalyov's confrontation with his nose that travels though the city disguised as a high-ranking official. The Assessor claims that the absence of his olfactory organ jeopardizes not only his career, but puts him into an awkward position, because he is also “vo mnogix domax znakom s damami: Cextareva, statskaja sovetnica, i drugie” ‘[acquainted with] the ladies of a number of distinguished houses: with State Councillor Chekhtaryov's wife, and others’ (Gogol, “Nos” 175; Gogol, “The Nose” 43). Here the link between Kovalyov's missing nose and the matter of the ladies begins to crystallize. The Assessor closes the appeal to his olfactory organ with an incomplete statement, claiming that “esli na èto smotret' soobrazno s pravilami dolga i cesti ... vy sami možete ponjat” ‘if you look at this strictly from the point of duty and honour... you must surely agree...’ (Gogol, “Nos”

175; Gogol, “The Nose” 43), highlighting the fact that it is duty and honor that are at stake in Kovalyov’s situation. The fragmented character of Kovalyov’s utterance, however, does not clarify the referent of the words *dolg*, or duty, and *cest’*, or honor. The duty could be the obligation of the nose to return to its original place, which the Assessor perceives to exist on the part of the nose, and the honor in danger then would be Kovalyov’s. But the word ‘honor’ may as well refer to the previously mentioned ladies, whose houses Kovalyov frequented, and now he feels in duty bound not to incriminate them and put their reputation at stake.

The anxiety concerning the ladies and social exclusion is brought up again in the next episode, when Kovalyov wants to place an advertisement with a newspaper. The narrative recounting the Assessor’s encounter with the clerk employed in the newspaper office provides further allusions, which imply that the venereal disease could be the cause of Kovalyov’s olfactory troubles. At the sight of the Assessor’s face, the clerk utters a comment evaluating the empty spot as being “soveršenno gladkoe, kak budto by tol’ko sto vypecennyj blin. Da do neverojatnosti rovnno!” ‘completely smooth, like a freshly cooked pancake. Unnaturally smooth, in fact!’ (Gogol, “Nos” 182; Gogol, “The Nose” 49). Although the word ‘unnatural’ may suggest supernatural, the change in the clerk’s attitude implies that he might have meant ‘not natural, abnormal, diseased.’

From this point onwards, the newspaper employee begins to communicate with the Assessor in a condescending and rather patronizing manner. He advises him that he should “to otdajte tomu, kto imeet iskusnoe pero, opisat’ ètu statejku v *Severnoj pcele* [...] ili tak dlja obščego ljubopytstva” ‘find someone with a flair for words and get him to

write it up as a rare occurrence of nature, then publish the article in the *Northern Bee* [...] or just for the interest of the general public' (Gogol', "Nos" 182; Gogol, "The Nose" 49). The clerk emphasizes that he, unlike Kovalyov, has a nose: he "ponjuxal ešče raz tabaku" 'took another pinch of snuff' and then, after few more words, "on utrel nos" 'wiped his nose' (182; 49). Finally,

"želaja skol'ko-nibud' oblegit' ego gorest', on pocel prilicnym vyrazit' ucastie svoe v neskol'kix slova: 'Mne, pravo, ocen' priskrovno, cto s vami slucilsja takoj anekdot. Ne ugodno li vam ponjuxat' tabaku? Èto razbivaet golovnye boli i pecal'nye raspoloženija; daže v otnošenii k gemorroidam èto xorošo" 'wishing to offer some measure of consolation he deemed it fitting to express his sympathy in a few words: 'I am most grieved that you have been the victim of such a peculiar accident. Perhaps you would care for a pinch of snuff? It dispels headaches and bouts of melancholy; it even has a beneficial effect on haemorrhoids.' (183-184; 49)

This certainly was not "neumyšlennyj postupok" 'a thoughtless gesture' (Gogol', "Nos" 183; Gogol, "The Nose" 50) as the narrator suggests. For in the nineteenth century, doctors used pulverized tobacco "as a cure-all, prescribing snuff for headaches, insomnia, toothaches, coughs, and colds, and as a general preventive against ailments from tuberculosis to syphilis" (Glaser 128-129). By offering the Assessor a pinch of snuff, the clerk implies that he understands the true nature of Kovalyov's olfactory difficulties.

While the clerk makes light of the issue, the superintendent of police receives Kovalyov in a less jovial manner. He does not mince his words when he tells Kovalyov that "u porjadnogo celoveka ne otorvut nosa i cto mnogo est' na svete vsjakix majorov, kotorye ne imejut daže i ispodnego v prilicnom sostojanii i taskajutsja po vsjakim nepristojnym mestam" 'if a man was respectable, he would not thus be rudely parted

from his nose, and that there were majors and majors in this world, some of whom did not even have a decent undershirt to their name and frequented the most disreputable places” (Gogol, “Nos” 184; Gogol, “The Nose” 51). The narrator again provides a commentary on the impact of the character’s words on Kovalyov when he says that they hit “ne v brov’, a prjamo v glaz” ‘Kovalyov’s Achilles’ heel!’ (184; 51). He also offers an explanation for the Assessor’s distressing response, stating that “on mog prostit’ vsjo, cto oni govorili o nem samom, no nikak ne izvinjal, esli èto otnosilos’ k cinu ili zvaniju” ‘he could forgive anything that was said about his person but would brook no disrespect for his rank or title’ (184; 51). The reference to the rank is highlighted, while the content of the offence, the accusation of a sexual misconduct, is glossed over. Yet Kovalyov was obviously taken aback by the superintendent’s words but did not deliver a heated defense of the rank as one might expect, but managed only to utter a feeble statement “priznajus’, posle ètakix obidnyx s vašej storony zamecanij ja nicego ne mogu pribavit” ‘I regret that after such offensive remarks on your part I am unable to make any further comment...’ (184; 51). He is left speechless and unable to defend himself. One could speculate if Kovalyov’s fast departure and inarticulateness were related to his conceit or to his guilty consciousness. After this assault Kovalyov writes an accusatory letter to Madame Podtochina, claiming that she “nanjala dlja ètogo kakix-nibud’ koldovok-bab” ‘hired for this purpose the service of witches’ (185; 52). In this way he himself identifies women as a cause of his misfortune, although the sexual state of affairs is hidden under the cloak of witchcraft.

These episodes clearly formulate the connection between Kovalyov's missing nose and sexual behavior. The superintendent's assault proposes that the Assessor may not have visited only houses of respectable women, such as Madame Podtochina, but also houses sheltering women of ill-repute. The doubts about Kovalyov's (dis)honorable conduct are moreover fuelled by his flirtatious behavior, by Podtochina's response to his letter emphasizing that "esli vy teper' že posvataetes' na mojej doreri zakonnym obrazom" '[if he was] now to seek the hand of [her] daughter in the legitimate way' (191; 57), he should receive her blessings. Also the nature of Kovalyov's relationship to the mother herself is put into question, when the Assessor, perhaps by the slip of the tongue, reveals that Podtochina, "štab-oficerša" 'the wife of a staff officer' (181; 48) is actually "xot' posle teperešnego postupnika" '[a woman] whose late husband was a staff officer' (189; 55). Kovalyov, then, could have been involved not only with the daughter, but also with her mother.

The above mentioned incidents and statements suggest that the Assessor probably is a sexually adventurous man, who could have contracted syphilis during one of his 'romantic' pursuits. Yet the narrator never provides a clearly articulated confirmation of the suspicion that he so successfully and elaborately suggests. Even the final episode, depicting Kovalyov's interview with his doctor, does not provide a resolution to the olfactory riddle, just like the medic does not provide Kovalyov with a solution to his troubles. Instead of making things clear, the doctor brings more of the Gogolian mist of ambiguity to the olfactory matter. He does not diagnose Kovalyov and claims that although he could stick on the Assessor's nose, "možno sdelat' ešče xuže"

‘the result [would] be far worse’ (188; 56). He recommends Kovalyov to trust “dejstviju samoj natury” ‘the action of nature’ and ”mojte cašce xolodnoju vodoju” ‘wash often with cold water’ (189; 56) and assures him that “ne imeja nosa, budete tak zdorovy, kak ecli bu imeli ego” ‘without a nose [he] will be just as healthy as if [he] still had one’ (189; 56). The doctor’s advice creates the impression that Kovalyov’s nose did not disappear because of the venereal disease and that the Assessor actually does not suffer from ill health at all. Yet with the notions of ambiguity and irony in mind, and taking into account the fact that the story would be read by censors, the doctor’s statement could be interpreted in a different way. He could speak ironically and then the meaning of the phrase “ne imeja nosa, budete tak zdorovy, kak ecli bu imeli ego” ‘you will be just as healthy as if you still had [a nose]’ (189; 56) becomes inverted, connoting ill health: the syphilitic nose was an extreme and visible symptom of the disease that did not necessarily affect all syphilitic patients. In Gogol’s days, syphilis was untreatable, therefore the rhinoplasty required by Kovalyov would disguise the disease but not treat it.

Nevertheless, regardless of the variety of possible interpretation, what matters most is not which of them is the ‘correct’ one or what the ‘truth’ is, for the text is constructed in such ways that it denies the possibility of a singular accurate reading and places its emphasis on the suggestion or appearance of truth. Lacking medical expertise and sufficient information about the disease that affected a significant number of individuals but was a social taboo, to many readers the sign distinguishing between the mark of honor and the stigma of corruption would still be the presence or absence of a

scar in place of the missing olfactory organ. Cloaked from the eyes of censors as a flat, smooth place, Kovalyov's nose still functions as an allusion effectively pointing to sexual misconduct and to its consequences, jeopardizing man's honor, career and the position within the social network. The olfactory organ thus serves to articulate a critique of morally corrupt behavior, which, as the incidents develop in confrontation with the missing nose, aims at the employees of the governmental administration. I suggest that constructing the olfactory organ as an image without a clear signification, the author created text that requires interpretation and investigation into its meaning.⁸

The main target of Gogol's critique is, however, the process of power abuse in relation to the creation of meaning. Kovalyov is in the story depicted as an individual that ruthlessly manipulates his environment by means of overt display of signs, which the society, due to its uncritical thinking induced by the governmental control over signification, accepts exactly in the way the Assessor desires. As the narrator of "The Nose" points out, Kovalyov was "kavkazskij kolležskij asessor" 'a Caucasian collegiate assessor' (171; 41) and explains that he did not acquire his rank and position through learning but only through two years of service in the remote area of Russia. Knowing that his rank does not earn sufficient respect, "čtoby bolee pridat' sebe blagorodstva i vesa, on nikogda ne nazyval sebja kolležskim asessorom, no vseгда majorom" 'to give himself greater weight and a sense of nobility he never called himself Collegiate Assessor, but always Major' (171; 41). As O. G. Dilaktorskaia points out in her historicizing study of "The Nose," Kovalyov's usurpation of the Major title is in fact a clever exploitation of the bureaucratic ladder of the country. The rank of major and the

rank of collegiate assessor are on the same level within the administrative system, but the rules of the hierarchy postulate that if two people are of the same rank number, the one who has obtained his in the service of the military has a privileged position.

Kovalyov then is a cunning image maker that infringes the established rules by exploiting the socially privileging signification of a rank title that does not belong to him and he achieves his goal with remarkable ease. He realizes that the society he lives in does not investigate into the true meanings of things, it is trained to respect governmental officials and accept the insignia of their power at face value. That is why he pays attention to his attire, the perfect shape of which should underline his privileged social status. To enhance the value of his position further, “[on] nosil množstvo pecatok serdolikovix, i s gerbami, i takix, na kotoryx bylo vyrezano: sereda, cetverg, ponedel'nik i proc” ‘[he] had about him a number of cornelian seals, some with crests and others with the inscription: Wednesday, Thursday, Monday, and so forth’ (Gogol, “Nos” 172; Gogol, “The Nose” 41). Although the real value and meaning of these seal is trivial, it is sufficient to impress the general public, ignorant of their true meaning, and perhaps also illiterate. Also other examples of Kovalyov’s behavior show that he is preoccupied with the creation and manipulation of meaning, that is with the promotion of his self-designed and self-imposed image. He exploits women by making use of their social status and prestige, using his acquaintance with them as a proof of his credentials. He also does not hesitate to take advantage of saleswomen working in the streets and invites them to come and look for him at his place; not giving them his address, he makes sure that they will walk about the street, asking for Mayor Kovalyov and thus disseminating the

reputation that he desires. His strategy is based upon the belief that a frequently repeated lie eventually becomes the truth and upon the society's non-investigative attitude towards meanings, placed into the circulation in public discourse by the governmental authorities.

Kovalyov then constructs his identity and social position on the exploitation of signs, both physical and verbal, which he uses to manipulate his environment. The artifice and emptiness of his career-focused character is discerned through the olfactory incidents. Building upon the physiognomic theory, Gogol unveils the discrepancy between the form and its content, to use a literary term, between the body and the soul. The missing nose brings Kovalyov's face into a physiognomically supported correspondence between the facial features and character traits. The nose shows that the Assessor is a poseur and an individual manipulating signs to implement and control the public opinion regarding his person. His desire is to project one, singular image, assuring his privileged social status and respect.

Constructing the missing nose as an image of dubious nature, the author encourages the readers to participate in a process that contradicts the one exploited by the Collegiate Assessor. Unlike Kovalyov, Gogol requires the readers to really look into the 'meaning' of Kovalyov. They can no longer be deceived by his abusive manipulation of truth and take the verbal and material signs he utilized to create his image-making shell at face value. The Assessor's nose does not call for acceptance, but for investigation. The author's description, which situates Kovalyov's olfactory organ halfway between a syphilitic nose and a mysterious occurrence, requires interpretative

involvement, an activity that should ideally be performed on the basis of everyday communication.

NOTES

¹ The origins of physiognomic studies and the Aristotelian influence are discussed in the scholarly works of Alfred Davis and Harold Holden.

² Davis and Tytler emphasize especially the influence of the nineteenth century writer Johan Casper Lavater, whose book on human physiognomy also contains a chapter on the signification of noses. Lavater's theories are not innovative, as Davis observes, but rather reiterate the prejudices and beliefs already held by the general public. The change that differentiates Lavater's work from the previous studies is his use of race as a physiognomic category. The racial classification of olfactory organs, suggestive of superiority or inferiority position on the evolution ladder, will become important to the discussion of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* but it is not so significant for the interpretations of Gogol's short story. Lavater's influence over the nineteenth century writers is noted in Rindisbacher's *The Smell of Books*, focusing on the role of the olfactory in fiction, and discussed by Davis and Holden. Also the study of Gabrielle Glaser, who provided an overview of historically determined perspectives on the nose, comments on the development of physiognomic theory.

³ It is also not without interest that the development of the olfactory folklore manifested in idiomatic language, proverbs and phraseology is not a specifically Russian phenomenon. In his book-length study on noses, Harold Holden presents a long list of English and French idioms revolving around the olfactory organ, and I could produce a similar overview in my native Czech language.

⁴ The influence of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* over Gogol's work is also discussed in the article of E.E. Dmitrieva, who above all focuses on the authors' use of humor and irony.

⁵ Vinogradov's study shows that Gogol utilized some of these anecdotes and transformed into episodes of "The Nose," for example the appearance of the nose in Yakovlevich's loaf of bread, Kovalyov's encounter with the employee of the advertising office, and his discussion with the doctor. The Russian critic also emphasizes that Gogol approached the olfactory creatively, allowing Kovalov's nose to acquire anthropomorphic features and travel around the city, impersonating a high-ranking official.

⁶ Gogol's sexuality, the nature or the lack of it, has been widely discussed amongst the critics. The scholars viewing Gogol's writing through the lenses of psychoanalytical theory suggest that Gogol was impotent and afraid of women. Karlinsky's interpretation of Gogol's correspondence and fiction suggests that he was homosexual. I believe that Gogol's fear of venereal diseases together with his obsession with his health, in my opinion apparent in the letters, should be taken into consideration in such discussions.

⁷ The way the English translation is laid out does not indicate, whether the censors deleted a word or two, or perhaps a whole sentence. Moreover, since the translation and selection was made not from the archival work with Gogol's originals but from a reprint from volumes of Gogol's letters published under Soviet times, it is possible that the erasure of the inconvenient words took place in the twentieth, not in the nineteenth century.

⁸ The contribution of the olfactory images to the constitution of the text as ambiguous will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

OLFACTORY INSCRIPTIONS IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

While Gogol developed his short story around olfactory absence, in *Midnight's Children*, the olfactory organ is overwhelmingly present. In addition to its structuring function, discussed in Chapter II, the nose is in both texts constructed as an ambiguous image. In this chapter I argue that in *Midnight's Children*, the ambiguity of the nose evolves through Rushdie's challenging and creative dialogue with physiognomic theory, which can be perceived as an example of a dominant narrative designed to develop and administer selectively created truths by postulating a fixed relationship between facial and character features. Rushdie's adaptation of physiognomy in *Midnight's Children* draws upon the physiognomic principles as the author describes the characters in the novel through their noses. At the same time the theory is challenged as its original premises are revealed as inaccurate, producing misleading, stereotypical and fixed meanings. Through the ambiguity of Saleem's nose, Rushdie directs his critique at politics established on dynastic principles. Employing the phallic connotations of the nose, he also addresses selected socially constructed taboos and pre-defined meanings of motherhood, childhood and parenthood. Finally, the author uses the phallic-nasal parallel to discern Saleem's textual (self)creation as a process involving reality ordering. Discerning the narrator's self-centered view of history, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* proposes that narratives and therefore texts cannot be universally valid, since they

always convey an agenda, a subjective viewpoint translating the world into its textual embodiment accordingly.

When the narrator of *Midnight's Children* provides for the first time in his autobiographic narrative the list of his family members, he characterizes them through their olfactory organs:

On Aadam Aziz, the nose assumed patriarchal respect. On my mother, it looked noble and a little long-suffering; on my aunt Emerald, snobbish; on my aunt Alia, intellectual; on my uncle Hanif it was the organ of an unsuccessful genius; my uncle Mustapha made it a second-rater's sniffer; the Brass Monkey escaped it completely; but on me – on me, it was something else again. But I mustn't reveal all my secrets at once. (14)

Although the narrator's nasally-oriented description, revealing the character traits of Saleem's relatives, suggests an application of physiognomic guidelines, an investigative interpretation discerns the author's challenging attitude towards the theory. The noses of Saleem's relatives are associated with their character traits, but the narrative is created from the retrospective point of view by an individual who is familiar with their personality and behavior. The olfactory characterization, then, is not a pure description but rather an inscription, imprinting onto the olfactory organs the character traits of their owners.

Rushdie's relationship to physiognomy is ambivalent; on one hand he seeks to undermine and challenge the principles concerning the body-mind relationship established by this theory, but on the other hand he is not completely immune to their attractions. Negotiating his position between rejection of and attraction to physiognomy, the writer finds himself admitting to the possibility of physical embodiment of character traits, personal experience and genetic heritage. Yet, in his view, the body, and the nose

are always perceived as signs or images, which both denote and connote. They are objects open to reading and interpretation, resulting from the projection of the reader's fantasies, prejudices and opinions. In Rushdie's view, the nose and the body are constructed as ambiguous signs, whose meanings are negotiated in particular contexts. The author then draws upon the ambiguity of the nose when he critiques the meaning-defining and imposing narratives constructed by the individuals in power, who project their subjective viewpoints and ambitions upon the rest of the nation.

The first nose described in the novel at length is the olfactory organ of Saleem's grandfather and it is the starting point of a critique directed at the social concept of blood relations as the only real foundation of a family and at the dynasty-produced ideology and political regimes in India and Pakistan. Its epithet "rippling" indicates that it initiates a chain reaction, producing a series of nasal images and olfactory-related episodes. Aziz's nose is so prominent that it "would have dominated less dramatic faces than his easily" (14). It is an eye-catcher, a focal point of his face, bringing the olfactory organ into the center of the observer's attention. The description of the nose as being "what one sees first and remembers longest" further foregrounds the central position of the olfactory organ within the narrative (14). However, its role and significance changes throughout the text. Drawing upon physiognomic theory, Rushdie uses Aziz's nose to familiarize the readers with the personal history of Saleem's grandfather and define his role in the narrative as one of patriarch and dynasty founder. Its exceptional shape with "nostrils flaring, curvaceous as dancers" and the "triumphal arch" that "swells [...] first up and out, then down and under, sweeping in to his upper lip with a superb [...] flick"

captured the attention of Tai, the old boatman, a figure of indefinable age and a repository of ancient traditions and wisdom (14). Looking at the nose of Aziz, who “was barely past puberty” at that time, the old man claimed that this nose was “a nose to start a family on” since “there would be no mistaking whose brood they were” (14). These words establish the regal-looking nose of Aziz and its features of “patriarchal respect” as unfailing signs confirming the legitimacy of his offspring and also inscribe the large nose as a figure of virility and fertility and of patriarchal strength (14). As Tai comments, “Mughal Emperors would have given their right hands for noses like that one” for they would recognize its potential to imprint a significant distinguishing and legitimizing marker into the faces of their offspring (14).

Yet Tai’s prediction of a bright patriarchal future established on physiognomic grounds and legitimized by the wisdom of the old, is nothing but a myth to be challenged and a mask created to disguise another reality. For, just like Methwold’s hairpiece, the patriarchal visage of Aadam Aziz’s nose is a false lead, instilling inaccurate expectations and beliefs in those who catch a glimpse of it. In fact, instead of assuming the position of an authoritative and uncompromising head of the family, he is frequently forced to negotiate his patriarchal space and power with his wife, who does not hesitate to articulate her opinions and execute them effectively through the instruments that she, as a true matriarch, controls: her body, voice, and distribution of food. In this way, Aziz’s life is not one of unconditioned patriarchal rule but one of unceasing struggle for and maintenance of dominance. Moreover, the doctor has no male offspring that would inherit the features of his patriarchal nose. He has only three daughters and their

children's olfactory organs, with the exception of Saleem's, do not display any of the majestic dominant features of their grandfather's face.

Saleem's nose is, however, not a physical feature confirming the boy's adherence to the family line started by Aadam Aziz, but a masterpiece of deceptiveness, undermining the plausibility of physiognomic theory. When Saleem was born, the shape of his olfactory organ convinces his parents that "the poor fellow, he's got his grandfather's nose" and the mother's reading of her child's nose becomes a guarantor of the boy's integration into the family circle, since it is accepted as a valid and accurate assessment (117). However, as Saleem gradually reveals, he did not inherit the nose that "mushroomed outwards and downwards" in his face from Aadam Aziz and therefore his nose is not an indicator of consanguineous relations, as his mother assumed, but a mask cloaking the truth (154).

As the narrative discerns, in the first moments after his birth, Saleem became a victim of an identity theft, committed by Mary Pereira, who in her first and last attempt at political activism, replaced the biological son of Aadam Aziz's granddaughter with the son of a poverty-stricken street singer Wee Willie Winkie and his wife, seduced by the departing representative of colonial power, Methwold. Consequentially, Saleem's body and nose bears evidence of very different blood relations than those claimed by his mother. The olfactory organ and other bodily properties are hereby open to other physiognomic readings, such as the end of British Empire, the multinational and heterogeneous heritage of the Indian subcontinent, and the instability of patriarchy and blood relations as guarantors of legitimacy. Baby Saleem is described as having eyes "as

blue as Kashmiri sky” but also “as blue as Methwold’s,” and “a nose as dramatic as a Kashmiri’s grandfather’s,” which is also “the nose of a grandmother from France” (117). These dominant features were not genetically passed on from Saleem’s ancestors; they are inherited from Methwold, an individual of a combined ancestry, whose nose was likely to be “prominent” since it was “the legacy of a patrician French grandmother – from Bergerac” (95).¹ The heritage that the nose reveals, is not homogenous but multilateral, not purely Indian but blending Indian blood with the blood of colonial powers that governed India during two successive historical periods. At the same time the bridge of Saleem’s nose bridges class differences, joining the European aristocratic bloodstream with the one of Indian low-caste ancestry.

Rushdie challenges physiognomy on its own grounds when he constructs Saleem’s nose as an ambiguous body part, open to interpretations that vary according to the subjective attitude and personal investment of the individuals who attempt to discern the nose’s meaning. *Midnight’s Children* suggests that physiognomic readings are in fact projections of people’s own fantasies and preconceived ideas. In Rushdie’s view, the surface of the body cannot account for the complexity of the mind. Physical properties and individual character traits therefore cannot be in a relationship of direct correspondence, “because a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of everwhichthing are jumbled up inside him, and he is one person one minute and another the next. The body, on the other hand, is homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one-piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will” (237). The multilateral genetic heritage of Saleem is disguised by the integrity of his

nose. While the blood circling in his veins is born out of diversity and plurality, his nose is interpreted as a claim of homogeneity, continuity of family heritage rooted exclusively within the Indian subcontinent.

Constructing Saleem's nose as an unreliable signifier of lineage and genetic heritage, Rushdie aims his critique at the socially established beliefs privileging blood relations as the only solid foundation of family, society and by extensions of politics. Although Saleem's mother interpreted her son's nose to suit her preconceived ideas about the physical manifestations of patriarchal lineage, she and her family were still able to accept and love Saleem after they learned the truth about the identity theft that made the boy their son. Their love and acceptance in spite of the boy's physically unappealing appearance contrasts the 'parental' approach of politicians towards the baby India they conceived in their minds.

Midnight's Children also leaves little doubt concerning the identity of the 'parents' who hold political power and abuse it ruthlessly to control their children: the states of India and Pakistan, onto which they inscribe their subjective viewpoints transformed into officially designated truths. The text of the novel introduces a complex gallery of minimally disguised characters extracted from the political life in India and Pakistan. As Rushdie shows through his account of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty practices, the generations of rulers consist of dominant individuals, who install into the body of governmental administration members of their families. The countries are thus ruled by democratically-elected individuals who take advantage of their position to project into politics and thus upon the country their own personal beliefs, fears and ambitions. The

universalized validity of their viewpoint becomes an official ideology. The force of history then consists of a family narrative and it is contrasted with the genealogy produced by Saleem about himself and his family. In Saleem's view, the story of the powerful is as valid and important as his own, but what makes the difference is that he is not in control of the mechanisms of power, which create and disseminate meaning through the tight control over publicly circulating discourse.

Rushdie's narrator does not conceal his negative opinion of the destructive effect of the governmental administration in the Indian and Pakistani states. The leading politicians of these countries are depicted as abusers of power and manipulators of truth who are ready to eradicate any oppositional viewpoint. Viewed from this angle, the destruction of Saleem and of the children of midnight was inevitable. They were a threat, because the magical powers they possessed were natural, not derived or established through manipulation and power abuse. As Tariq Rahman proposes, the magical children "stand for humanity in the essentialist sense of the word" (112). As such, they were in direct opposition to the bureaucratic systems of Indian and Pakistani politics, which were capable of producing nothing but massacres, violent coups and continuous military and social warfare. As representatives of an alternative narrative and alternative reality, they had to be suppressed to ensure the complete and unchallenged rule of the dominant narrative produced by those in power.

The challenging approach to physiognomy employed by Rushdie to articulate a critique of the governmental abuse of power is developed further in the text as the author directs his attention to the sexual reading of the nose carried out through centuries by

numerous works of fiction. He takes advantage of the penile implication of the nose to explore those dimensions of sexuality that are generally excluded from everyday conversations. Pointing to the socially constructed taboos of parental and adolescent sexuality, Rushdie once again reveals the social practices of truth denial.

The relationship between noses and sexuality is made explicit in the first pages of the novel and maintained by means of olfactory imagery through the text. The nose is established as an analogue to penis in Tai's description of Aadam Aziz's nose. The ancient boatman tells the maturing boy that the "big cucumber in [his] face is wagging like the little one in [his] pajamas" (17). Making a vegetation-based metaphor, Tai comments both on the size of Aadam's olfactory and sexual organs at the time when Saleem's grandfather was "barely past puberty" (14). At the time of writing his autobiography, Saleem himself makes use of the same metaphor, when he refers to his penis as "the useless cucumber hidden in my pants" (121), revealing his impotence and reminding readers of the derogatory nicknames of "cucumber-nose" imposed upon him in childhood (154).

The olfactory-phallic parallel is further emphasized by the images of dripping and leaking, conflating the sexual and sensual, the olfactory and phallic. In Rushdie's novel, "things – even people – have a way of leaking into each other [...] like flavors when you cook" (38) and feeling and character qualities are "dripp[ing] into" their recipients (73). The sexual connotations of the visual imagery of dripping and leaking are further supported by the ceaseless flow of discharge from Saleem's nose. The snot dripping down from his nose alludes to a very different bodily and typically masculine

fluid. Tai's reading of Aadam Aziz's nose outlines its magnificent feature and directly relates the nose to the reproductive capacity of the scrutinized teenager. The boatman perceives "dynasties waiting inside it" and, acknowledging the ambiguous meaning he attributes to the boy's nose, adds to his description a coarse simile "like snot" (14). Obviously, the experienced old man imposes his phallic reading upon the innocent teenager Aadam and the rough vulgarity of the comment drawing upon the similarities between the consistency of sperm and snot emphasizes the phallic connotation of the olfactory organ.

The penile properties of the nose and the conflict between the transition from the childhood innocence into the world of adults recounted in this episode are mirrored in the story of Aziz's grandson Saleem. A significant portion of *Midnight's Children's* narrative evolves around the issues related to maturing, growing up and exploring the unknown world of adulthood. As I will show, Rushdie's text utilizes the phallic connotations of the olfactory organ to depict the process of initiation not only into mental but also physical adulthood. In the novel, the development of the nose goes hand in hand with the exploration of one's body and bodily functions and of the world of adults. Moreover, the way Rushdie develops the reciprocal relationship between Saleem's olfactory organ and his genitalia is suggestive of medical opinions commonly held in the nineteenth and in the beginning of the twentieth century.

As Gabrielle Glaser outlines in her analyses, the olfactory organ has fascinated not only physiognomists, philosophers and writers of fiction, but also physicians whose diagnosis of the nasal diseases surprisingly coincided with the beliefs and surmises

developed within the non-medical circles. The nineteenth century medicine generally accepted the mutual relationship between the nose and the reproductive organs of men and women. Diagnosing the patients with sinusitis and other nasal conditions, Victorian physicians “interpreted chronically swollen, runny noses as the body’s own punishment for a lack of sexual self-restraint” (Glaser 55). They proposed that sexual intercourse “between husband and wife was likely to result in temporarily stuffy nasal passages for both sexes, but more troubling were the chronically swollen noses of those who made a habit of ‘overstimulating’ their genitals” (Glaser 55). As Glaser points out, the nineteenth century medical discourse did not completely miss the point, since “decades later, scientists would discover that the nose actually did swell during sexual excitement, but only temporarily” (55). Masturbation was thus offered as a common explanation for nasal congestion in the nineteenth century medical texts, and is suggested as a possible cause of Saleem’s chronic nasal troubles also in the text of *Midnight’s Children*.

When Saleem was eight, his father, intoxicated by alcohol, came into Saleem’s bedroom checking on his behavior, since he suspected that his son was up to something “filthy” (Rushdie, *Midnight’s* 155). He called him a “pig” and threatened him that “God punishes boys who do that” (155). Reflecting upon the reproaches of his wife, Saleem’s father defends his suspicion of his son’s masturbation suggesting that she should “look on his face! Whoever got a nose like that from sleeping” (156). Although the father’s accusation of Saleem’s self-gratification may seem unjustified, since the boy was only eight and a half, the text provides other accounts of Saleem’s behavior, implying that his father’s observation was not incorrect.

Only two or three years later, Saleem finds himself in a rather awkward situation with his Aunt Pia, who would be “cradling [his] head so that [his] nose was pushed down towards her, cradling [his] head so that [his] nose was pushed down against her chest and nestled wonderfully between the soft pillows of her indescribable” breasts (243). In this way, Saleem gained his first sexual experience with the female body, yet nobody suspected that he could nourish any sexual attraction to his aunt. Saleem’s environment was deceived by his body image; although he was already “prematurely testicled,” he did not wear long trousers that would appropriately signal his physical entry into adulthood but shorts that were socially perceived as “the badge of sexual innocence” (243). In this way, Saleem might have actually started the sexual exploration of his body earlier than his mother was willing to believe, just as his father suspected.

Moreover at the time of Ahmed Sinai’s nocturnal invasion into his son’s room, Saleem had already developed a habit of hiding into washing chest, where he could “conceal” and draw “strength and comfort from sheets and towels” (160). Here he would find refuge from the outside world, which humiliated him by nicknames inspired by the perpetually congested olfactory organ and uncontrollable nasal discharge. In “the unclean place,” his “nose ran freely into the stone-doomed linens” and he frequently “plunged into its soft continuum of (predominantly white) textiles, whose only memories were of [his] earlier visits” (160). One could, however, speculate about the true nature of Saleem’s visits to the washing chest. The imagery of uncleanness, dripping, leaking and discharge makes Saleem’s description of his behavior ambiguous. Also the sexual escalation of the episode, when Saleem becomes an involuntary witness to his mother’s

conversation with her former husband, suggests that Saleem's hideaway in the washing chest could have been directed at the exploration of his body and of the forbidden body parts. The forbidden fruit of secretiveness and self-gratification is tasted in the same room also by Saleem's mother who, unaware of her son's presence in the washing chest, allows her "hands which held the telephone now hold flesh" as she performs on her body the recollections of the sexual experiences from her first marriage (162). Then, picking up her clothes, she exposes to Saleem's eyes her "rump, black as night, rounded and curved, resembling nothing on earth so much as a gigantic, black Alfonso mango" (162). The room, in which Saleem found a secret shelter, is also the place keeping the secrets of his mother, whose self-gratification hints at the possibility of Saleem indulging in the same type of activity. The explicitly textually articulated sexual behavior of Saleem's mother and the ambiguous description of Saleem's visit to the washing chest construct the room with the dirty laundry as an image of a place, where not only unclean clothes are stored, but also dirty secrets. In this way, the interpretation of Saleem's ambiguous conduct in the washing chest leans in the direction of sexual exploration.

The sexual nature of the washing chest incident is connected with Saleem's olfactory organ on another level. As he tries to avoid sneezing, his nose, "responding to the evidence of maternal duplicity, quivering at the presence of maternal rump, gave way to a pajama cord, and was possessed by a cataclysmic – a world-altering – an irreversible sniff" (162). Consequentially, his nasal passages ruptured and created new spaces to be flooded with mucus, conjuring the supernatural gift of telepathy.

Also other incidents in Saleem's life involving the olfactory organ and causing its changes are related to sexuality. The surgery on Saleem's nose, draining his mucus-filled sinuses, takes place shortly after his erotically charged stay in the house of his "divine" aunt Pia (243). This visit lead towards the public acknowledgement of his physical maturity, and also to the surgical procedure that forever took away from him the gift of telepathy. Saleem then begins to explore openly the previously inaccessible olfactory and sexual pleasures. For him, sexuality and odors are intertwined, the sensation of one intensifying the other. Odors enhance the bodily pleasures but also lead towards better understanding of the self. It is through his adventures with Tai Bibi, the old prostitute who can combine sexual intercourse with emanation of scents and odors that Saleem learns about and is forced to acknowledge his incestuous desire for his sister Jamila.²

So far, the reciprocal relationship between olfactory organ and male genitalia follows the traditional views coined by physiognomy, equating a sizeable nose with a sizeable and potent phallus, and the nineteenth century medical readings, which interpreted chronic sinusitis and other nasal diseases as consequences of unhealthy and excessive masturbation. The reciprocity of the olfactory-phallic relationship is in *Midnight's Children* articulated on a much more explicit level than in Gogol's "The Nose." Rushdie, unlike Gogol, does not need to be concerned with censorship and with disguising the phallic connotations of the nose to such an extent as Gogol. The social tolerance level towards sexual explicitness and towards public discussion of sexuality has been raised significantly during the one hundred fifty years separating *Midnight's*

Children from “The Nose.” Yet, the aspects of human sexuality Rushdie chooses to explore in his novel are those beyond the realm of conventional public exposure, just as the discourse of syphilis in Gogol’s times.

Rushdie makes part of the genealogy of Saleem’s family the genealogy of their sexual relations. Frequently, the details concerning the erotic experiences and marital life of the novel’s protagonists seem to spice up the narrative, appealing in a tabloid-like manner to the readers’ potential desire for sensationalism. On a deeper level, however, the author’s goals are different than those of providing a cheap entertainment. He refuses to abide by the “proper dietary laws” outlining the topics that can be discussed and information that can be released in family narratives. As the narrator of *Midnight’s Children* shares, “one is supposed to swallow and digest only the permitted parts of it, the halal portions of the past, drained of their redness, their blood. Unfortunately, this makes the stories less juicy; so I am about to become the first and only member of my family to flout the laws of halal. Letting no blood escape from the body of the tale, I arrive at the unspeakable part; and, undaunted, press on” (59). Although he confirms to his intention to spice up his narrative by the forbidden stories, he also seeks to provide a complete account of family history. Moreover, confiding information about sexual interaction between husbands and wives, details about their sexual secrets, such as masturbation and infidelity, and finally revealing the facts of his own sexuality and incestuous desire, Saleem’s narrative may not as much please the readers as make them uncomfortable, because the topics under discussion are those generally avoided or denounced in any public discourse. The text thus seeks to unmask sexuality by targeting

precisely its forbidden aspects, the taboo topics of children's sexuality, parental sex and incestuous desires, avoided in public discussion. These reveal the current ambivalent relationship and lack of honesty concerning the issues of sexuality. Additionally, they discern the filtration of truth and meaning through the grid of social agenda, which selects the safe, appropriate and preferred truths at the expense of denying the factual reality of everyday life.

Rushdie's sexually and phallically charged narrative seeks to challenge the frequently romanticized idea of growing up, the transition from childhood to puberty and finally to the word of adults, frequently depicted in fiction as an exciting adventure. For Saleem, growing up is far from being only about loss of innocence, access to the knowledge of the self and of the world of adults. Above all, his narrative is concerned with the "the painful, engrossing torture of growing up" (229). The text of *Midnight's Children* discerns that the notion of the romantic teenage years is just a facade, cloaking the anxiety of a maturing individual. Saleem is confused by his own physical changes and by the environment of grown-ups he begins to explore. He is also totally exposed to the authority of adults who exercise control over his body and behavior without providing help or understanding for the troubled youth.

By focusing on a particular individual and his olfactory experience leading towards the exploration of sexuality and life in general, Rushdie also challenges the generalizing approach of the physiognomic and medical theories employed to construct the image of the nose as corresponding to the size and function of male genitalia. As the author shows in his text, people differ from each other in characters, bodies and desires.

The body itself is then exposed to numerous changes in the course of one's life, starting from the moment of birth, through childhood, puberty, adulthood and progressive aging. Apart from its natural evolution, the body can also become subject to mechanical intervention, causing in it irreversible changes. The invasion into the private space of the body is the final step Rushdie takes to undermine the validity of physiognomic theory.

Saleem's nose, resembling in its features and prominence the nose of his grandfather, would in accordance with the physiognomic observations stand as a symbol of virility and mighty procreative power. Yet, the protagonist's sexual behavior does not fully confirm such reading. The reproductive trajectory of Saleem's sexual life develops from its initial stages, during which the body is explored through self-gratification, to the first experiences of sexual intercourse with prostitutes. Up to this point, Saleem's behavior corresponds with the phallic connotations inscribed in his nose. Shortly afterwards, however, his experimentation with Tai Bibi circumscribes his sexual activity. Once he realizes that his love and desire are directed towards his sister, he is unable of any sexual involvement with other women. Their features, such as those of Parvati, become transformed in Saleem's eyes to those of Jamila, making for him every act of lovemaking incestuous, and therefore physically impossible. Saleem's virtual impotence is later inscribed into his body by the act of castration conducted for political reasons on nearly all of the midnight's children.

Saleem's castration, depriving him of reproductive potential and potency at the same time, also undermines the traditional physiognomic readings of the nose. In spite of the phallic disaster, Saleem's nose remains intact, performing superbly its olfactory

functions, and through its features still conveying the, now no longer true, message of its owner's virility. Yet the post-castration development of Saleem's life insists at least to some extent on the interconnectedness between nose and phallus.

After his release from prison, Saleem finds shelter in the pickle factory and begins work on his autobiography. The activity of writing often takes place at night, making Saleem's companion Padma "jealous of written words" and resenting "nocturnal scribbles as though they were the very flesh and blood of a sexual rival" (121). She is also "distressed, perhaps, by the futility of her midnight attempts at resuscitating [Saleem's] 'other pencil', the useless cucumber hidden in [his] pants" (121). To her great disappointment, Padma finds out that the consequences of castration are irrecoverable and that nothing but memories will "return to leak out of" Saleem (208). The images of leaking out referring to memory, to penis as a pen and to writing as being nocturnal places the activity of writing a memoir into erotic context. Saleem's creative activity, using his nose to sniff out the past and retrieve reminiscences from his memory seems to take place in the consequence of sublimation of procreative power. Unable of procreation, Saleem focuses on creation. Deprived of the opportunity to father offspring, Saleem produces text. Instead of transmitting genes, he preserves his memory to be passed on through his adoptive son Aadam to future generations.

Saleem's writing, however, may be interpreted as a manipulation of meaning. He is strongly convinced of his centrality not only to his narrative but to the development of his country's history. To support Saleem's conviction of being "handcuffed to history," Rushdie takes advantage of the physiognomically established guidelines when the novel

presents an incident inscribing the interconnectedness with India upon Saleem's body (9).

Recollecting his childhood memories, Saleem recounts the incident between himself and Mr. Zagallo, which began with the teacher's attempt to humiliate the student and escalated into a violation of Saleem's bodily integrity. The extraordinary size of Saleem's nose "elephantine as the trunk of Ganesh" attracted the attention of Zagallo, who maliciously exposed Saleem to the eyes of his classmates and encouraged them to partake in his cruel joke (155). Tugging on the boy's nose, he proposed to the students that "thees object here," Saleem's nose was "human geography" (231). In the face of Saleem, whom he called "thees ugly ape," Zagallo imagined "the whole map of India" (231). The nose was "the Deccan peninsula hanging down" and the stains on his face were interpreted as Pakistan when the teacher describes them as "thees birthmark on the right ear is the East Wing; and thees horrible stained left cheek, the West" (Rushdie, *MCH* 231-232). The children, eager to please their teacher, completed his physiognomic 'geography lesson' by interpreting the discharge dripping from Saleem's nose as Ceylon.

Although Zagallo's interpretation of Saleem's nose and face was intended as a joke motivated by the teacher's malicious desire to hurt and humiliate his student, his personally invested subjective reading of the facial stains and the dripping nose coincides with Saleem's self-perception. The boy is burdened with his ugliness, but more importantly he is obsessed with the notion that his life and destiny are inseparable from those of his country. He claims that he and the thousand children born within the first hour of India's independence "were only partially the offspring of their parents –

the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered [...] by history” (118). The way Saleem’s body is constructed in the text is suggestive of a correspondence not between Saleem’s physical properties and his character traits but between his body and the body and character of his country. The multilateral genetic and class heritage reflects the hybrid yet socially, economically and culturally diverse life of the country. The homogeneity of Saleem’s body and of his nose, which is constructed as a mask concealing the truth and as an ambiguous sign open to interpretation, discerns the artificial and deceptive character of the notion of India as a national state. The homogenizing effect of the name happens only on the surface, and is misleading, since what is beneath the name, and within the boundaries of the country, is a diverse life, heterogeneous, incompatible phenomena exposing the unified whole to the danger of fragmentation. Furthermore, the parallel between the country and Saleem’s body and nose is emphasized at other places in the text; the “public morale drains away” as Saleem’s sinuses are drained, and the narrator himself perceives the appearance of cracks in his body and anticipates its total disintegration, while he gives account of the progressive fragmentation of the Indian subcontinent when Bangladesh declares its independence from Pakistan (Rushdie, *MCH* 301). The innovative parallel drawn between Saleem’s olfactory organ (and also his face and body) and the Indian continent is a new fresh way of engaging the physiognomic notions designing the body as a screen upon which various character features are projected. The magical properties of Saleem’s olfactory organ, its integrity and the violations imposed upon it, draw attention to the inner life of his country. The contrast between the homogeneity of the body and the

seeming semantic transparency of the nose reflects the relationship between the integrity and fixity of boundaries and the inner national, cultural and religious diversity of the territory and the people that inhabit it. The idea of a national state is discerned as mythical, an illusion brought into life by the power of selected individuals to be believed in by the Indian multitudes, just like Saleem believes in the magical properties of his nose – its telepathic ability and later the extraordinary sense of smell.

Rushdie intentionally contrasts Saleem's professed centrality to his narrative and to history with the subjectivity of his creative method. As a result, the narrative challenges the grand narratives generated to circumscribe the ambiguity and multiplicity of reality and reduce it to officially designated and sanctified meanings. Saleem's approach to the past is genealogical; he positions himself into the center of his world and manipulates the rest of the elements so that they are organized to match his conviction. Additionally, the nose, which crystallized through its multiple interpretations and signification as an ambiguous image, is in *Midnight's Children* incorporated into the very foundation of the text, into its narrative method. As I discuss in Chapter VI, the olfactory invests the process of textual creation with inherent unreliability and subjectivity of viewpoint.

NOTES

¹ This makes the nose a textual inheritance as well, a literary hand-me-down from *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

² The specificity of olfactory perceptions is underlined in Le Gu érer's study, which observes that "humans produce a characteristic odor in the air around them that reflects their diet and/or health, their age, their sex, occupation, race" (24). The sense of smell is also an inherent site of interpretation and evaluation, since it is "the prime means we employ for discriminating between the pleasant and the unpleasant, the known and the unknown. It can inspire either recognition or rejection" (Le Gu érer 25).

CHAPTER V

OLFACTORY AS A VEHICLE OF AMBIGUITY IN “THE NOSE”

In April 1836, Gogol's *Inspector General* was finally performed in theatres, following the author's victorious battle with censors, who had refused to grant the permission to bring the play to the Russian audience. Gogol reflected upon this experience with censorship in a letter to M. S. Shchepkin:

The reaction that [*Inspector General*] produced was big and noisy. Everyone is against me. Respectable middle-aged civil servants shout that there is nothing holy for me if I dare to talk this way about those who serve the government. The police are against me, the merchants are against me, the literary people are against me. [...] There were already people trying to have it forbidden. Now I see what it means to be a comic writer. The slightest phantom of truth, and not one man, but entire classes will rise up against you. (*Letters* 54)

In response to the censorship, Gogol took his case to tsar Nikolai I who overruled the censors' decision, authorized the play's publication, and “attended the premier performance on April 19 with a number of his ministers and rocked with laughter” (Proffer 7). Following this experience, Gogol worried: “I can imagine what it would have been like if I had taken something from Petersburg life – which I know better and more completely than provincial life now” (*Letters* 54). Yet, contrary to his expectations his short story “The Nose,” which came out at the same year as the nearly forbidden *Inspector General*, set in the country's capital and addressing issues from the contemporary social life, did not meet such adverse reaction. Writing “The Nose,” Gogol led his censors by the nose. Following his observation that “the slightest phantom of

truth” could stir up strong reaction, he wrote the story in such way that it completely cloaks the reference to extra-textual reality in the atmosphere of dream and fantasy (*Letters* 54). As I propose in this thesis, to lead the censors by the nose and at the same time articulate comic and ironic social critique, Gogol constructed the olfactory organ as an ambiguous image. He utilized both the denotative and connotative properties of the nose to simultaneously cloak and reveal the story’s relationship to his social world. Thus the author could claim, if confronted by censors, that the story was nothing but a fantasy, a non-mimetic product of imagination. Attentive readers would, however, note that the author used the olfactory organ to direct their attention towards specific social vices.

It can be inferred from several of the scholarly responses to Gogol’s “The Nose” that the writer indeed succeeded in covering the critical edge of his work under the cloak of fantasy, imagination and nonsense.¹ Searching vainly for traces of causality in the text of Gogol’s story, Alexandr Slonimsky and Gary Morson conclude that “The Nose” has neither explanation nor purpose. Slonimsky claims that the story creates its own universe based on “comic alogism,” a device, which “consists of comic destruction of logical and causal connections” (351). As a result, “nonsense not only lies at the heart of the individual comic episodes but shapes the comic line as a whole, and ultimately creates an entire nonsensical world” (Slonimsky 345).² Morson reaches a similar conclusion when he claims that “the adventures of the nose are neither a freak of nature nor a supernatural occurrence or a delusion: they are not *explicable in any way*” (233).

The characteristics of the inexplicable, comical and nonsensical highlighted in Slonimsky’s and Morson’s readings are also typical features of dreams. As other critics

observed, the dream-like quality of the story is embedded in the temporal framework of the story. Thomas Seifried and Peter Spycher have noted that Gogol's story in fact does not take place within twelve days between March 25 and April 7, as it might seem at first sight, but in the course of one night. As they explain, the time gap between the two dates mentioned in the story is enclosed by the juxtaposition of two different calendars that were used in the nineteenth-century, the Gregorian in the West and the Julian in Russia, which implies that the story takes place in one night, in dream time.

However, the significance of the fantastic should not be emphasized at the expense of the real. I argue that the story is carefully structured in such way that it oscillates between the world of fiction or fantasy, and the world of reality. The image of the nose is, in my view, the key element that retains this type of ambiguity throughout the text. Its dubious nature becomes apparent in the very beginning of the short story, in its title.

The author entitled his work "Nos," a word denoting the olfactory organ but suffering from a loss of connotative meaning when translated into other languages. The English equivalent "The Nose" does not convey the playful disposition embedded in the Russian original, where the word for the organ of smell contains a pun. When read backwards as *son* the word acquires the meaning of 'dream.' The Russian expression can therefore be viewed as a site, in which the dimensions of the real and the fantastic intersect, naturally producing a zone of ambiguity.

V. V. Vinogradov, who discussed Gogol's work in its historical and discursive context, argues that the writer was aware of the connotative aspects of the word nose. He

comments that in the earlier drafts, the story was entitled “Son” or “Dream” and that the dream became converted into the nose only in the final stages of writing, before the text’s publication. The fact that the author contemplated the two words as alternative titles for his work suggests that he realized that each of the two words would produce a different effect in relation to the construction of meaning in the story. Had the word ‘dream’ remained in the title, the author would have directly placed the plot of the story into the realm of the fantastic. The events would then be read as something experienced in a dream, that is in a state of mind, when all things are possible, everything gets distorted and nothing can be taken for real and reliable. By giving preference to the word denoting olfactory organ, Gogol however highlights the real, the bodily, or the material. I therefore interpret the change in the story’s title as a strategy to point at the mimetic aspects of the story and at the same time retain the aspects of the fantastic, which would protect the story from the attacks of censors.

In my reading of “The Nose,” the title functions as a cue suggesting the permeable boundary between the world of the corporeal and tangible reality represented by the word *nos*, or nose, and the immaterial and elusive world of the fantastic and non-real represent by the word’s inversion into *son*, or dream. The ambiguous quality of the title invites the readers to investigate and participate in the creation of its meaning. I thereby propose that the notion of ambiguity introduced into the story through the olfactory operates on multiple levels. In relation to censors and to the hypersensitive critiqued social groups, “The Nose” draws attention to its fantastic aspects and disguises its mimetic and critical character as a dream. The author thus protects his work from

manipulation by the governmental administration. In relation to readers who do not participate in the power system, the ambiguity of the nasal image draws attention towards the possible mimetic relationship between the content of the story and the social context in which “The Nose” was written. Gogol’s work could thus be considered a lesson in critical thinking. Oscillating between the material world of noses and the immaterial worlds of dreams, the readers, if they want to come to terms with “The Nose” and its signification, must get involved in a constant process of interpretation and decision-making.

On one hand, the narrator of the story employs vocabulary, such as “javlenie neiz”jasnimoe” ‘inexplicable phenomenon,’ “ neobyknovenno[e] zrelišce” ‘extraordinary spectacle’ and “stranno[e] proisšestvi[e]” ‘extraordinary occurrence’ that draws attention to the supernatural and inexplicable features of the story (Gogol, “Nos” 173; Gogol, “The Nose” 42).³ On the other hand, the extraordinary is set in and contrasted to an ordinary setting. The episodes of the story are situated in very specific and realistic environment, the city of St. Petersburg, which is described in detail, providing specific topographic landmarks and depicting the tumult in the city streets. Also the behavior of the characters and the way they interact with their environment would not be considered anything else but common behavior of ordinary men if it was not for the strangeness of the object Yakovlevich wants to discard and Kovalyov to find. Nevertheless, the missing nose can be read as an image referring to an actual nasal absence in individual’s faces. As I argued in Chapter III, in Gogol’s days such physical deformation would not be as rare as it is nowadays, and would convey specific cultural

and historical meaning, namely the explicit reference to syphilis and implicitly immoral behavior. Yet in compliance with the fluidity of the title, the missing nose cannot be viewed as a word referring solely to extra-textual reality, but also as an image functioning on a metaphorical and purely imaginative level. In “The Nose,” Kovalyov’s olfactory organ does not actually disappear but deserts the unlucky gentleman’s face to become an independent individual impersonating a high-rank official. The nose walking down the St. Petersburg streets once again draws the story towards the fantastic dimension, while its behavior and speech clearly reflect the arrogant attitude of high-ranking governmental officials, drawing attention to Gogol’s social critique.

The uncertainty concerning the plausibility and implausibility of recounted events is further reinforced by the doubts felt by both protagonists who rack their brains trying to find the explanation for their nasally-induced troubles. The problem is that neither one of them actually knows how exactly the events that now haunt them came about. Although they blame dark powers, claiming that only “*čert ego znaet, kak èto sdelalos*” ‘devil knows what happened,’ and women’s sorcery, as Kovalyov does in his letter to Madame Podtochina (169; 38). The truth is that both the barber and the Collegiate Assessor cannot rule out the possibility that they have actually caused their misfortune themselves. Neither of them can recollect the events of the previous night and as they admit, this information deficit may result from their states of intoxication.

Startled by the appearance of an olfactory organ in his bread, Yakovlevich ponders the nose with following words: “*Pjan li ja včera vozvratilsja ili net, už navernoë skazat' ne mogu. A po vsem primetam dolžno byt' proisšestvie nesbytocnoe; ibo xleb -*

delo pecenoe, a nos sovsem ne to” ‘Perhaps I came home drunk last night, or perhaps not, I can’t say. But on the face of it this is quite unaccountable; I mean, bread is something you bake and a nose is nothing of the kind. It’s a complete mystery!...’ (169; 38). Uncertain about the credibility of his memory concerning the events of the previous night, the barber seeks explanation in the supernatural. Although the mysterious appearance of the nose unbaked in a loaf of bread that came hot straight from the oven is undeniable, the reliability of the barber’s observation is undermined by the exclamations of his wife, who calls him “mošennik” a ‘villain and “p’janica” a ‘drunkard’ (168; 38). In their verbal exchange following the discovery of the nose, she even proposes that it is Yakovlevich, who is responsible for the amputation of Kovalyov’s nose, since she shouts at him “gde èto ty, zver', otrezal nos” ‘where did you cut off that nose, you butcher’ (168; 38). Even the narrator of the story is not very supportive of the barber’s credibility when he claims that the barber “kak vsjakij porjadocnyj russkij masterovoj, byl p’janica strašnyj” ‘like every self-respecting Russian tradesman was an incorrigible drunkard’ (169; 39).

Doubts of a similar nature also overwhelm Kovalyov, who contemplates his situation in this way:

“Neverojatno, ctoby nos propal; nikakim obrazom neverojatno. Eto, verno, ili vo sne snitsja, ili prosto grezitsja; možet byt', ja kak-nibud' ošibkoju vypil vmesto vody vodu, kotoruju vytiraju posle brit'ja sebe borodu. Ivan, durak, ne prinjal, i ja, verno, xvatil ee” ‘It’s most unlikely that a nose should disappear; totally improbable. I’m neither dreaming, or imagining it; perhaps instead of water I drank the vodka which I rub on my face after shaving. That fool Ivan didn’t clear it away, and I must have picked it up by mistake.’ (185; 51)

Not only is Kovalyov unsure, whether he was drunk last night or not, he is not even certain about his sobriety in the very moment of his speaking: “čtoby dejstvitel'no uverit'sja, čto on ne p'jan, major ušcipnul sebja tak bol'no, čto sam vskriknul” ‘in order to make absolutely sure that he wasn’t drunk the major pinched himself painfully that he even cried out’ (185; 51). While the pain convinced that he was not sleeping, the reader is not granted the privilege of certainty about the signification of the text. Since “čto on dejstvujet i ževjot najavu” ‘being quite fully awake’ does not imply sobriety, the readers can only speculate whether the two protagonists are hallucinating, still intoxicated, dreaming a real dream or actually experiencing something supernatural (185; 51).

Finally, the ambiguity of the text arises from the way the story is presented through a third person narrator who on one hand acts as if he was omniscient, providing insight into the circumstances of the story and reading the character’s mind, and, on the other hand, avoids a conclusion of the plot by pretending insufficient degree of knowledge.⁴ The narrator abandons Yakovlevich who is interrogated by a policeman at the bridge where he dropped the nose into the water and claims that “zdes' proisšestvie soveršenno zakryvaetsja tumanom, i čto dalee proizošlo, rešitel'no nicego ne izvestno” ‘at this point proceedings become enveloped in a fog, and we know absolutely nothing of what ensued’ (170; 40). He pulls the same trick in the end of Kovalyov’s adventures when he states that “no zdes' vnov' vse proisšestvie skryvaetsja tumanom, i čto bylo potom, rešitel'no ne izvestno” ‘at this point the incident is enshrouded in a mist, and what ensued is totally unknown’ (192; 58). Obviously, the narrator is not very reliable when it comes to providing precise information. His attitude, pretending that he does not

have any further information to share, actually shows the lack of desire or willingness to continue in the narrative. In this way, Gogol proposes that in the world of fiction, as in the real world, meaning is created through a process of selection and manipulation. Each discourse then is constituted of meanings that are carefully selected and approved, while others are abandoned, forbidden and denied.

Gogol's narrative voice in "The Nose" parodies the omniscient viewpoint; it becomes an interrogation of the social constructions of meaning. The final part of the story presents the speaker as indecisive and uncertain about the plausibility of the events he has just presented. He reveals his doubts when he notes that "teper' tol'ko, po soobraženii vsego, vidim, čto v nej est' mnogo nepravdopodobnogo" 'only now, when we ponder the entire story, do we see that it contains much that is highly implausible' (195; 60). Yet, only a few lines earlier he tried to convince the readers that "čepuxa soveršennaja delaetsja na svete. Inogda vovse net nikakogo prabdomodobija" 'the most absurd things happen in life. Sometimes they defy all the laws of verisimilitude' (192; 58). These statements show that the narrator's opinion concerning the non/mimetic character of the story fluctuates; he leans towards the irrational foundation of the story only to claim an empirical basis for the events a moment later. The storyteller maintains his insecure attitude until the final lines of "The Nose," in which he attempts to persuade readers through an interrogative contemplation:

"A, odnako že, pri vsem tom, xotja, konecno, možno dopustit' i to, i drugoe, i tret'e, možet daže ... nu da i gde ž ne byvaet nesooobraznostej?... A vse, odnako že, kak porazmysliš', vo vsem ètom, pravo, est' čto-to" 'yet all the same, all things considered, we could perhaps concede this and that, and the odd thing here and there, and maybe even... I mean strange things happen all the time, do they not?' (195; 61)

Nevertheless, in the sentence that follows and that is at the same time the last sentence of the story, he takes a surprisingly strong stance arguing that ‘kto cto ni govori, a podobnye proisšestvija byvajut na svete, - redko, no byvajut’ “whatever you might say, such things do happen – rarely perhaps, but they happen all the same’ (195; 61). The narrator’s last words have a slightly confrontational character, as if the speaker, having successfully convinced himself of the truthfulness of his tale, wanted to challenge every hesitant reader and dismiss all doubts concerning the verisimilitude and plausibility of the presented events.

The concluding passage of “The Nose” can be viewed as an attempt to resolve the conflict between the real and non-real in favor of the real and feasibly experienced, once again highlighting of the mimetic dimension of the text. At the same time the final metanarrative passage of Gogol’s work unmask the process through which meaning is brought into existence in the public sphere. The contemplative character of the discourse should stimulate the readers’ awareness of the fact that reality is essentially ambiguous. As such, it can convey multiple meanings that are brought into existence through the act of interpretation and verbalization. The final lines of “The Nose,” then, reveal the process of persuasion, constituting truth and meaning. By constructing his text through the olfactory images and other narrative techniques as ambiguous, Gogol refutes any totalizing aspirations, imposing singular meaning upon his text. In this way the author stimulates the readers’ critical thinking and interpretative skills, instructing them in the techniques of meaning production and creation that they might apply to other, non-fictional texts. At the same time, the ambiguous character of the story allows Gogol to

protect his work from the power of censorship. By means of incorporating the obviously fantastic elements into the text, Gogol succeeded in mystifying and manipulating the censors by using the tools of their own craft. Through them, he could impose upon the story a singular, proper and desired meaning and claim that “The Nose” is devoid of any connection with reality and belongs exclusively to the realm of dreams and fantasy. Yet, as I argued, the text is constructed as ambiguous and conveys social critique, and the fantastic is only a medium that serves to lead the true manipulators of signification by the nose.

NOTES

¹ As Simon Karlinsky points out in his book-length study, the perception of and critical responses to Gogol's work have changed through the decades since the time of its publication. The nineteenth-century critical school led by Belinsky considered Gogol the founder of Russian realism. The turn of the century and the emergence of Freud's theory inspired a group of critics, who analyzed "The Nose" through the lenses of Freudian theory. The 1920s gave rise to a school of Marxist critics, who emphasized Gogol's attack on political ideology and his social origin. Currently, the most respected views on Gogol's work are those articulated by Andrei Bely and symbolists, who focus at the playful and mystical aspects of Gogol's art. My reading of Gogol's "The Nose" views the olfactory imager in "The Nose" as a constructed image, but at the same time I maintain that the work was not just a joke or a playful fantasy but contained a social critique. When I use the term social critique, I do not have in mind criticism conducted from Marxist viewpoint; I propose that the main target of Gogol's work was censorship and the governmental officials producing and controlling meaning. In my view, the writer does not primarily address class conflicts but the issue of manipulation of meaning by the ruling authorities, which impose its power upon the lives of individuals.

² Slonimsky cites Gogol's words in his study and uses him as a support for his critical observation. In his statement, Gogol characterized the first period of his writing, while for the second period was typical "a broad grasp of life and at the same time [...] an intensification of the comic element" (Slonimsky 327). Gogol himself situates the beginning of this new period into the year of 1836, when *Inspector General* was published. It is, however, also the year when "The Nose" came out. I therefore suggest that one has to look beyond the comic and obviously fantastic and search for the reflections of the real life in the story. As I will show in chapter four, the missing nose itself can be interpreted in this light.

³ Alexandr Slonimsky, who analyzed the whole body of Gogol's work, points out that this was a strategy that Gogol frequently employed in his writing. Slonimsky writes that "the sense of fantasy, improbability, and strangeness is emphasized by Gogol himself in his works, with words like "strange," "unreal," "implausible," "incongruous," "rubbish," etc." (346).

⁴ Gogol's treatment of narrative voice is discussed in greater detail by Efraim Sicher and Alexander Zholkovsky. Efraim Sicher employs Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia to point out that Gogol's narrator actually combines two voices into one: the serious and the parodic. "The 'serious' voice is mediated through the authorial point of view, achieving comic diversity in the *heteroglossia* of speech. Parodic stylization, then, reveals the author's ironic stance in the extent to which the word is 'on display' or objectified (214). Sicher's discussion emphasizing the distance between the author and the narrator he created comes close to Zholkovsky's analyses of Gogol's work, which touches upon the author's engagements of "skaz" genre in his stories. Defining the genre, he writes that one of its crucial elements is the "distinction between intellectually and stylistically unreliable narrator and the implied author, who towers above him simply because we the readers cannot imagine an author so stupid and inept" (173). Sicher's and Zholkovsky's critical observations then show that Gogol made use of the narrative voice to support the comic effect of his story.

CHAPTER VI

OLFACTORY AS A NARRATIVE METHOD

IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

The extensive body of criticism devoted to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is dominated by the discussion of the novel's account of history. Steven Connor and Linda Hutcheon, who examined the fictional depiction of past events in post-war novels, place *Midnight's Children* in the category of "historiographic metafiction," fiction displaying acute awareness of the constructed nature of historical accounts (Hutcheon 5). The relationship between history and fiction in *Midnight's Children* is also addressed in the work of other critics, such as Clement Hawes, who perceives it as a critique of the Western myths of origins, and Jean-Pierre Durix, Ron Shepherd and Tariq Rahman, who analyze the novel's depiction of history in relation to the book's genre and narrative method. Other critics, such as R. S. Pathak, Dieter Riemenschneider and Lorna Milne narrow their focus to the relationship between individual and history. These scholars unanimously agree that Rushdie's novel contains a critique of the political life in India and in Pakistan and that the text seeks to rewrite the officially produced historiographic accounts.

Joining the critical discussion outlined above, I agree with the conclusion that Rushdie's text views history as a construct and that the author discerns this fact by creating his own "critical revisiting:" Saleem's subjective account of the experienced historical events (Hutcheon 5). I believe, however, that the critics overemphasize the

historical dimension of Rushdie's novel. Its narrator Saleem traces his family genealogy to the point of his grandfather's return to Kashmir, in other words, he is preoccupied with the presentation of history, which is very recent and most of which he actually experienced as the past but as the present during his lifetime. I therefore propose that instead of merely discerning the constructed character of the past by writing another version of it, Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* actually discerns the methods producing such history. The novel emphasizes the fact that meaning is generated constantly and therefore does not lie in the past but is created in the present moment.

In this chapter I argue that the essential feature of reality as it is reproduced in Rushdie's fiction is ambiguity. I propose that this notion is introduced into the novel in addition to the elements of the fantastic and magical, highlighted in the articles of Durix and Shepherd, through the process of narration itself, namely through its connection with the olfactory imagery. I suggest that in *Midnight's Children* Rushdie intertwines the activity of remembering and smelling into the composite act of writing an autobiographical story. The act of smelling, which is at the same an interpretative activity, is also used to undermine the dominant narratives that divide the world into dichotomies to rule out ambiguity and control meaning. I propose that Rushdie employs the olfactory-based narrative method to establish ambiguity as a fundamental property of reality and human existence. Simultaneously, olfactory images are used to discern the unreliable character of narratives relying on olfactory memory. They also emphasize the fact that every process designed to produce meaning and truth is in essence manipulative. Presenting his narrative in a way supporting his view of centrality to his

country's history, Saleem's autobiography conveys a critique of power abuse and manipulation of signification conducted by the country's leading politicians.

Driven by the desire to give meaning to his life and preserve family history for his son, Saleem begins to write a retrospective account, tracing the genealogy of his family. Spending all of his time in a pickle factory managed by his ayah Mary, he makes chutney during the daytime and writes his autobiography at night. The successful completion of both activities is, in Saleem's case, dependent on the extraordinary olfactory sensitivity of his nose. It can detect the ripeness of fruit, and penetrate into the decaying tissue under the peels. In the same extraordinary manner, Saleem's nose has the power to transgress the boundaries of time and sniff out the hidden secrets of the past. Saleem's story is therefore produced through a specific narrative method, resulting from the combination of remembering and smelling, writing or storytelling.

In her comparative study of three olfactory-engaging novels by Rushdie, Süskind and Tournier, Lorna Milne argues that the extraordinary sense of smell functions in these texts as a guarantor of authenticity and objectivity. In Saleem's case, the supernatural abilities of his nose, its telepathy transformed into extraordinary olfactory sensitivity, render the narrator omniscient. They support his authority as a historiographer and reliable presenter of the past. Nevertheless, Saleem's credibility is not bulletproof. In her article, Milne proposes that the main devices undermining the reliability and accuracy of Saleem's narrative are "his explicit references to the difficulty of giving an exhaustive and totally accurate account of events, owning up occasionally to lies or omissions in his narrative" (32). The critic's observation certainly provides an accurate assessment of the

effect produced by Saleem's metanarrative commentary. Yet it does not account for other sources that are, in my opinion, more powerful vehicles of unreliability, and more importantly ambiguity.

The text of *Midnight's Children* is written by Saleem, whose creative activity of writing results from the conjunction of smelling and remembering. The relationship between the two processes has been carefully investigated in the studies of Morgan and of Herz and Engen, who provide interesting conclusions regarding the olfactory-mnemonic connection.

Researchers, investigating the relationship between the act of encoding into memory and the environment in which the remembering takes place, suggest that human memory, apart from retaining the specific event or occurrence, registers also its environmental context. Then in the reverse process, these contextual elements can be employed to stimulate memory and elicit information that it had previously encoded. Morgan's study examines the function of memory in relation to human sensory perception and arrives at the conclusion that odors are especially potent and effective retrieval cues. They can act as "powerful reminders of past events, resulting in the recall of a forgotten occasion or event or in the recall of vivid memories from the distant past" (Morgan 1227).

From this point of view, Saleem's shelter, the pickle factory in Bombay, is the ideal setting for writing an autobiographic story, since "events are recalled best when tested in the environment in which they were learned" (Morgan 1227). The factory premises are situated in the city where he grew up and they surround him by odors

emanating from the pickling chutney, the very smells that permeated his childhood. Saleem himself emphasizes the effect that the pickle fragrances have on his ability to recollect the past. “Pickle-fumes,” he writes, “heavily oppressive in the heat, stimulate the juices of memory, accentuating similarities and differences between now and then...” (Rushdie, *Midnight's* 166).

Memory research also suggests that an olfactory-rich environment may contribute to the credibility of Saleem's narrative. Herz and Engen write that olfactory perceptions are stored in memory alongside other contextual information for a particular event but they have a unique position among them. The collected empirical data on long-term odor memory suggests that “long-term odor memory may be distinguished from memory for other stimuli by being unusually resistant to decay” (Herz, Engen 304). Pointing to the ability of olfactory-stimulated memories to resist the erosive effect of time and highlighting the power of odors to activate mnemonic paths and recall memories, this scientific observation is suggestive of the persistent, and therefore more reliable, character of olfactory-based memories.

A text created from olfactory-induced and produced memories, then, might be considered reliable, and its narrator credible. Yet my further discussion of the role of the olfactory-based narrative method challenges such conclusion. Detecting the events and incidents that took place years ago, Saleem's nose also provides their interpretation. The olfactory organ in *Midnight's Children* thus performs the function of both narrative and interpretative tool. When interpretation is bound to recall, reliability becomes ambiguous.

Rushdie constructs the olfactory organ as an instrument subverting the established dominant narratives, designed by individuals in power and in control of the process of signification. Since these generally operate through dichotomic classification, Rushdie uses the olfactory organ to target precisely this binary system of reality ordering.

Researching the socio-cultural perceptions and implications of odors in human history, Annick Le Gu  rer registered the fact that the common tendency regarding odors is to classify them and situate them within a good-bad dichotomy. She observes that “the olfactory sense is the prime means we employ for discriminating between the pleasant and the unpleasant, the known and the unknown” (Le Gu  rer 25). Yet the line separating the good from the bad cannot be drawn with precision and universally since the evaluation of odors as pleasant and unpleasant is, as Rindisbacher notes, “anthropologically as well as socio-historically coded” (“Peddlong Eros” 52). The narrator of *Midnight’s Children* is well aware of the socially and culturally determined value of smells noted by these scholars. Describing his experience after a surgical procedure which activated his olfactory sense, he confides that he “had been incapable of smelling a thing” for all his days before the surgery and when he finally acquired the sense of smell, he was “ignorant of all olfactory taboos” (307). Unaware of the social boundaries distinguishing good from bad and acceptable from unacceptable fragrances, Saleem was free and eager to explore the world of olfactory sensations to its full extent. After the surgical correction of his congested sinuses, he entered into the “dizzying days before categorization” (317). He spent them riding through the city hunting and

absorbing the widest range of smells and fragrances. Yet soon after, Saleem felt the need to make sense of his newly experienced sensation. Inevitably, he had to proceed towards organization and evaluation of the overwhelming amount of odors and develop a set of criteria that would structure his olfactory environment into a comprehensible unit.

Saleem's progress towards olfactory classification, to a "general theory of smell," reflects the deficiencies in the verbal system, which does not contain sufficient lexical means to describe and evaluate odors (317). It seems as if language was not able to come to terms with the invisible, ephemeral and hardly material nature of scents. In his work on the role of the olfactory in selected nineteenth century European novels, Hans Rindisbacher argues that there is not vocabulary that would refer to odors on a purely denotative level. Instead, our linguistic conceptualization of olfactory perceptions "necessitate[s] a linguistic detour through the metaphoric, that is, a breach of reference level in the text each time we attempt to describe smells adjectivally" (Rindisbacher, *Smell* 15). As a result, odors are usually characterized by means of a comparison using the expression 'it smells like' or through a reference to their origin, employing the words 'it smells of.'

I view the metaphoric and connotative character of language used to conceptualize the realm of odors as an important aspect of the olfactory, which challenges the reliability and stability of meaning in Saleem's narrative. If the lexical equipment of language is insufficient to describe odors accurately and precisely, the writing mediated through odors consequently cannot aspire to precision and accuracy. The incapacity of language, then, challenges the reliability of memories that were

elicited and created through the olfactory stimuli. It is true that odors help to create and recollect memories, but nothing then guarantees that our verbalization of the recalled will be adequate to convey all the richness and complexity of the material contained in our minds.

Saleem's "early attempts at ordering" suggest that he is actually acutely aware of this problem: he addresses precisely the insufficient capacity of language to classify odors (318). As if he wanted to defy the limitation of language, he attempts to invent his own criteria to structure the diversity of olfactory perceptions that surround him. He claims:

I tried to classify smells by colour – boiling underwear and the printer's ink of the *Daily Jang* shared a quality of blueness, while old teak and fresh farts were both dark brown. Motor-cars and graveyards I jointly classified as gray ... there was, too, classification-by-weight: flyweight smells (paper), bantam odours (soap-fresh bodies, grass), welterweights (perspiration, queen-of-the-night); shahi-korma and bicycle-oil were light-heavy-weight in my system, while anger, patchouli, treachery and dung were among the heavyweight stinks of the earth. I had a geometric system also: the roundness of joy and the angularity of ambition; I had elliptical smells, and also ovals and squares ... a lexicographer of the nose. (318)

Saleem's words show that the point of reference selected as a basis for the olfactory classification is not the scents' origin. The narrator's approach is more innovative; he borrows vocabulary from other senses – from the sense of vision that can classify colors and shapes, and from the sense of touch, which perceives shapes and weight of objects. Moreover, distinguishing smells by color, weight and shape, Saleem creates a classificatory system that abandons dichotomies that are conventionally applied to describe and evaluate smells. Saleem's diversification of the dichotomy generally

employed to evaluate smells thus stands out as his first attempt to challenge a grand narrative that prescribes and imposes signification on otherwise diverse and ambiguous phenomena.

Saleem's later experience leads him to the conclusion that in order to design a complete system of olfactory classification, he must incorporate value judgements. He maintains that his work will be useful only if it acquires "a moral dimension" (318). Searching for the ultimate reference points, he still avoids the dominant classificatory good-bad dichotomy, when he replaces it with words of greater gravity: "good and evil" and "sacred or profane" (318). Saleem's intention is to develop what he calls "the science of nasal ethics" (318); a system based not on subjective but on objective criteria and thus universally accepted. His translation of "purdah-veils, halal meat, muezzin's towers, prayer mats" into sacred odors and of "Western records, pig meat, alcohol" into profane odors shows that instead of developing his own morally invested scale applicable to the realm of the olfactory, he actually adopts the value-system inscribed into reality by his ideologically and religiously saturated society (318).

Yet, although Saleem integrates these culturally determined evaluative principles into his classificatory system, he himself refuses to accept and interiorize the meanings they produce. He confides that "the sacred, or good, held little interest for me [...] while the pungency of the gutter seemed to possess a fatally irresistible attraction" (318). His appreciative and evaluative attitude to smells rebels against the ideologically promoted systems of meanings and signification. According to Saleem's inverted views, it is not alcohol, pork, and Western music that are profane, but the paraphernalia designating the

forceful and obvious display of religious zeal, which Pakistan converted into political ideology.

Saleem's fascination with olfactory sensations, labeled socially as repellent, thus highlights the subjective character of his interpretative attitude towards his environment. It also discerns the fact that although societies regulate people's attitudes to odors by means of creating 'olfactory taboos,' the actual act of sensory perception is an act always carried out on individually. Through his system of olfactory classification, Saleem draws attention to the rich and diverse nature of reality, which is essentially multi-dimensional and ambiguous, and therefore generative of numerous variant interpretations. In his vision of the world, these individual micro-narratives compete and fight against the grand narratives that are created and promoted by the individuals in control of social discourse and administration of power.

The olfactory is then constructed not as a sense promoting objectivity, but subjectivity of viewpoint. The accuracy of the author's approach to the sense of smell is supported by the results of experimental research concerning the operational modes of memory in relations to odors: relationship to smells is invested with their personal attitudes, feelings and emotions. Outlining the results of tests concerning the autobiographical odor-evoked memory, Herz and Engen point out that olfactory cues do not necessarily instill recollections that would be more accurate than those produced by other cues, but that the olfactory-elicited memories are certainly "the most emotionally potent experiences" (Herz, Engen 306). This conclusion based on empirical data conveys implications significant for the development of meaning in *Midnight's Children*.

Since Saleem's autobiographical narrative is based exclusively on events that were encoded into his memory in association with olfactory stimuli and retrieved from memory by means of olfactory cues, the text can be viewed as highly authentic, but certainly not as objective and fully corresponding to the extra-textual historical reality. Although the novel situates the story in historical, spatial and temporal settings, and although its content inclines towards the genre of a memoir, the nature of the narrative is purely subjective and related to the narrator's evaluation and individual interpretation.

In the text, Saleem creates his own olfactory universe that consists of smells and fragrances, but also of his reading of people's emotions and feelings. Saleem's extraordinary nose has "the ability to look into the hearts and minds of man", track down the secrets and dispositions they have been concealing from their environment (200). *Midnight's Children* generates a vision of the world in which people's actions, ideas, and feelings produce odors that can be registered by only one individual who is endowed with supernaturally sensitive nose. Saleem's nose is so powerful that it can even transcend the boundaries of time. He claims that "using [his] nose [...] turning it inwards, [he has] been sniffing out the atmosphere in my grandfather's house in those days after the death of India's humming hope" (51-52). Saleem's olfactory organ, then, both guides Saleem through the labyrinth of the mnemonic paths in his mind and functions as a vehicle or a time machine that can transport him across decades to the lifetime of his father and grandfather. It creates a "new, all-knowing memory, which encompasses most of the lives of mother father grandfather grandmother and everyone else" (88).

This function of the olfactory suggests that the pickle fumes stimulate not only Saleem's memory but also his imagination. The link between the olfactory and imagination had been previously drawn by Jean Jacques Rousseau. In *Emile* he posits that "in society, the imagination has such strong effect on the sense of smell that it tends to become confused with it" and claims that "the sense of smell is the sense of imagination" (Le Gu  rer 169). Pointing to the interconnectedness of the olfactory and the power of imagination, Rousseau highlights the spellbinding power that odors can exercise over human perception. His observation implies that smells are not really supportive of reasoning, but rather stimulate dreaming and fanaticizing. Consequently, perfumes with their ability to "create the same kind of vagueness, imprecision, and mistiness as well as the same wedding of form to formlessness, of permanence to ephemerality, of life to death, as poetry does" are predestined to be given role of the carrier of ambiguous and subjectively conceived meanings that they have in *Midnight's Children* (Stamelman 92).

Additionally, Saleem's method of textual production, which relies on his olfactory organ and is therefore highly subjective and unreliable, also discerns the mechanisms of the process, through which meaning is created to be subsequently inscribed into reality as the truth. The narrator's treatment of odors shows that every aspect of reality, being essentially ambiguous, can produce multiple interpretations. In Saleem's view, "reality is a question of perspective" and therefore it is always subjective and particular (Rushdie, *Midnight's* 165). Reproaching Padma for her disbelief, Saleem tells her: "I told you the truth [...] Memory's truth, because memory has its own special

kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality in heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (211). In this comment, Saleem discerns that every process of meaning production is, just like his memory, essentially selective and manipulative. In his version of reality, created through the conjunction of smelling and remembering, he is the pivotal point around which the national history of India and Pakistan turns and evolves.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The discussion in this thesis evolved around the role of olfactory images in Gogol's short story "The Nose" and in Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*. I proposed that both authors employ nasal images as a structural and cohesive elements, organizing their narratives into essentially linear sequences of episodes. Both texts also use the olfactory images as constituents of meaning valued for their fluidity and ambiguity; these being the very features that Gogol and Rushdie install into the very foundation of reality. Their narratives, constructed through the employment of the nasal imagery as texts open to inquiry and interpretation, then, contrast with the characteristics of the dominant narratives circulating in the public discourse. As I pointed out, the author's olfactory-permeated works discern social construction of meaning as a manipulative process tied to the abuse of political and administrative power. The dominant, socially approved narratives promote pre-selected truths and facts while suppressing and denying others. Cloaking their critique in the mist of olfactory mediated ambiguity, both Rushdie and Gogol compose their works as a lesson in critical thinking, which should be first directed to their own texts and then to reality itself.

With this in mind it must be stated that this thesis is also a construct, resulting from a specific selective and interpretative process. Focusing on the olfactory in relation to the structural and semantic architectonics of the text, I identified one of the points of intersection between "The Nose" and *Midnight's Children*. My discussion, informed

with literary criticism and scholarly works on the olfactory, was, however, largely based upon close-reading of Rushdie's and Gogol's texts, with occasional consideration of the biographical and historical context. Although I resisted the idea of creating a study, which would read one text through the lenses of another, the structure of the thesis was primarily established through my interpretation of "The Nose." Gogol's short story, which is in comparison with *Midnight's Children* organized in a more transparent and comprehensible manner, was the lead I followed when I decided to group the raw material produced through my analysis of the texts into chapters. In other words, the structure of the thesis was found through Gogol's "The Nose" but to give each author his own voice, their works are discussed in two sets of chapters that share a common theme but discuss it within the particulate context of the respective work. My intention was to discuss the similarity between the role of the olfactory images in both texts but at the same time preserve and capture the specificity of each author's approach. Therefore I decided to juxtapose "The Nose" and *Midnight's Children* in separate chapters evolving around the same general topics.

I believe that my discussion of Gogol's employment of the olfactory images in "The Nose," which, as I propose, inspired Rushdie's creative engagement with physiognomy and scent theory in *Midnight's Children*, contributes a new perspective to the scholarly study of both authors. In the near future, I intend to build upon the foundations laid in this thesis and pursue the olfactory path further back in literary history. My plan is to create a nasal triangle that would bind and juxtapose Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Gogol's "The Nose" with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Due to the

discussion among literary scholars, who draw the links between Gogol's and Sterne's works and between Rushdie's and Sterne's novels, this seems both natural and inevitable direction of my work.

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VITA

Name: Magdalena Vintrova

Address: Husova 50, Blansko 678 01, Czech Republic

Education:

1977– 2001 Dipl. in English and Czech from Palacky University in the Czech Republic

2002 - 2004 M.A. in Comparative Literature, Texas A&M University

Professional

experience:

1997 – 2002 Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Medicine, Palacky University, Czech Republic

2003 - 2004 Teaching Assistant for Russian, Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Texas A&M

Awards:

2002-2004 Recipient of William J. Hlavinka Fellowship awarded by the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas

Languages

spoken:

Czech (native), English, Slovak, Russian